

THE
EXCURSION.

VOLUME THE SECOND.

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THE

IN TWO VOLUMES.



EXCURSION.

BY MRS. BROOKS.

AUTHOR OF THE HISTORY OF LADY JUDITH
VOLUME THE SECOND
MANCHESTER, AND AT LONDON, MONTAGUE

VOL II

LONDON

Printed for T. CADELL, in the STRAND

MDCCLXXVII

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BY MRS. BROOKE;

AUTHOR of the History of Lady JULIA
MANDEVILLE, and of EMILY MONTAGUE.

V O L. II.

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M D C C L X X V I I.

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BY MR. E. O. K. E.

Author of the History of Lady Jane
Hastings, and of Emily Montague.

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B O O K V.

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B



THE EXCURSION.

BOOK V.

CHAP. I.

IF Miss Villiers was elated with the sudden return of her noble lover, a return which she, with great appearance of probability, attributed to the excess of his affection, and his inability to live longer absent from her; she was still more so on receiving

from him the next morning a letter, in which, after some general professions of the most ardent passion, he intreated permission to attend her in Berner's-street any evening she would appoint, when he could have the pleasure of entertaining her, without witnesses, on a subject of the utmost consequence to the future happiness of *his* life, and, he flattered himself, of *hers*.

She read the letter a thousand times; she kissed the beloved name by which it was subscribed: her heart beat with emotions equally new and delightful.

She had *hoped*, but till this charming moment she could not with any propriety be said to have *believed*, the reality of that happiness which now appeared to await her.

She sat down to write; it was the first letter in which she had ever entered into so interesting a subject: Lord Melville was the
first

first man she had ever suffered to speak to her of love, the first man she had ever regarded even with approbation.

She was embarrassed; she took up the pen; she proceeded; she found the letter too tender; her delicacy was alarmed; she wrote another, she found it too cold.

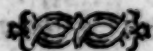
Dissatisfied with every sentiment which occurred, she determined on sending only a card, to fix an evening when she might have the pleasure of seeing him.

But, what evening? was the question; and a question not easily answered.

Though she would have wished a conversation on which so much depended, in respect to her future days, to have taken place immediately, yet modesty (for she was superior to art), and that bashful timidity inseparable from youth and sensibility like hers,

influenced her to postpone Lord Melville's proposed visit till Thursday.

She therefore wrote him, not an answer to his letter, but a short card, inviting him to tea, and, if he had no other engagement, to supper, on Thursday evening.



C H A P. II.

THE most perfect ignorance of the world, and the most unsuspecting temper existing, will, in candid minds, but in no other, apologize for Miss Villiers's extreme imprudence in inviting Lord Melville to a *tete-a-tete* supper; and that, in consequence of a declaration which was far from being explicit as to its tendency.

The

The exuberance of her joy had once more hurried her beyond the bounds of that indispensable, that cardinal virtue, Discretion; a virtue without which all others lose their exterior lustre, and which is the only adequate guardian of female honour.

The world will judge, and it has a right to judge, by probable appearances; and though innocence may escape the snare it has laid for itself in forming an indiscreet appointment, yet reputation will be the inevitable sacrifice.

The dignity and purity of Maria's mind left her without an idea of danger from such an interview; and even, if a doubt had arisen, her unbounded esteem for, and confidence in, the object of her affection, would have silenced it.

Convinced of the rectitude of Lord Melvile's intentions, the least shadow of suspicion would, in her own opinion, have rendered her unworthy his generous, his disinterested tenderness.

Her imagination represented to her in the liveliest colours his transport at placing the woman he loved in a situation so worthy of her.

She would have almost envied such excess of felicity to any being but Lord Melvile.



CHAP. III.

HIS lordship saw the whole affair through a medium extremely different.

Maria's

Maria's invitation left him not a doubt of success in his design; a design he had been forming with great coolness and deliberation ever since he left his father's seat in Yorkshire.

He therefore sat down, to consider how he should regulate the future household, and state the necessary expences, of our heroine, whom from this moment he regarded as a part of his equipage.

His marriage, the preliminaries of which were settled, though he had not yet seen his intended bride, and which was to be concluded soon after his father's return to town, made it impossible for him to think of taking her to Grosvenor-street.

It was therefore necessary she should have a house, and an establishment of her own.

Naturally liberal in every part of his expence, he was profuse, and with a strong mixture of ostentation, in his pleasures.

As no man of the world marries with any view but that of paying off the old debts of his paternal estate, in order to be able to contract new ones in his turn, a mistress is an almost indispensable part of a matrimonial arrangement in high life; unless, which is a plan attended with some hazard, affairs of gallantry with women in high life should be preferred.

The declared mistress of a man of his rank ought to appear with eclat.

The *declared* mistress it was determined she should be.

As vanity was the predominant passion of his soul, he could not resist the triumph his imagination promised him, in producing (as
soon

Chap. III. THE EXCURSION. 11

soon as decency after his marriage would permit) so much beauty, as his property, to the world.

Indeed, this was his most powerful motive for making choice of our heroine, his inclination being much stronger for Dorignon; but Dorignon was not handsome enough to do honour to his choice.

He had however another reason for the preference he gave to Miss Villiers.

The vivacity of Dorignon's temper rendered her the most improper mistress breathing for a man who intended to marry.

There would have been no answering for the manner in which she might have expressed her irascible feelings, if she had met her honourable rival in public.

Mais, a nos moutons.

B. 6.

The

The fortune of the destined Lady Melvile, and the consequent settlements to be made by his father on himself, would render his situation affluent, and justify a little extraordinary expence in so important an article as a mistress.

Miss Villiers's person, her air, her conversation, her deportment, her *tout ensemble*, conveyed so strikingly the idea of a woman of condition; she was so formed to become an elegant style of life; her present appearance (if we set aside her being in a lodging) was so correspondent to that idea, that he could not think of offering her common terms.

Convinced, as he was determined to be, that she was an adventurer, and that her views corresponded with his own; yet he felt a kind of respect, when with her, for which he could not account.

It

It was not sufficient to make him desist from his pursuit, but it determined him to make such an ample provision for her as should demonstrate to the world the generosity of his disposition, and, at the same time, give the ostensible goddess of his idolatry that exterior splendor which aims at confounding ranks and characters, and putting humble virtue out of countenance.

A dramatic writer, whose name I forget, says, "Virtuous women walk on foot;" which must not be understood to insinuate, that only vicious women go in carriages; and can certainly mean no more than this, that, if a woman is not born to a coach, she will never acquire one by her virtue.

From which premises we draw a conclusion; a conclusion which may not perhaps be universally subscribed to, that a coach is not, as some people suppose, a necessary

conco-

concomitant of human happiness; since heaven could never intend its creatures should be less happy in proportion as they deserved to be more so.

In other words, heaven could never ordain, that poverty should be necessarily the companion of virtue; or, that “Virtuous women should walk on foot.”

A propos, I have often wondered at the various ideas annexed to this respectable word, virtue; a word which in ancient Rome meant public spirit; in modern Rome means a taste in the fine arts; in England, at least in the female vocabulary, means chastity; and in France has little or no meaning at all.

CHAP. IV.

THERE are lovers who would have thought it a tedious interval between the present hour and Thursday evening.

Not so Lord Melville: the opera to-night, and Bach's concert to-morrow—he did not well know how to spare Thursday—if she had luckily fixed on Friday, he had no engagement.

Some true-born Englishman, some genuine son of nature, who has not softened his manners, and hardened his heart, by a French education, may perhaps wonder at the *sang froid*, and stoical deliberation, with which Lord Melville pursued a mistress, whom he notwithstanding intended to support at an extravagant expence.

He

He will be surprized that he should coolly sit down and calculate this expence with the precision of a clerk in a merchant's counting-house; and be so methodically discreet in an affair which seems founded in indiscretion.

He will set no bounds to his astonishment when he is told, that this young man, who is not deficient either in understanding or good-nature, chuses to incur the guilt of seduction without even the excuse of passion to alleviate his crime.

But a man of *bon ton* is a man of reason, not of passion; he is invulnerable to the shafts of beauty; and is vicious from principle, not inclination.

It is to the shrine of Vanity, not to that of Love, his adoration is directed.

Not

Not meerly a man of reason, he is a man of snow: or, to express it better in the beautiful lines of one of my fair country-women:

“ Cold as the snows of Rhodope descend,
 “ And with the chilling waves of Hebrus blend;
 “ So cold the heart where vanity presides,
 “ And mean self-love the bosom-feelings guides*.”



CHAP. V.

A Moment, gentle reader, let us step to Lady Blaft's.

Ten dowagers obeyed her summons; the merits of the cause were fully stated; and after debates which might have done ho-

* The Bleeding Rock, a Legendary Tale; written in the true spirit of poetry, by Miss Hannah More.

nour

nour to the senatorial abilities of A— and B— themselves; debates whence ministers and patriots might equally have culled the fairest flowers of elocution; Miss Villiers was found guilty of having, by her indiscretion, forfeited her title to be one of *the world*, and was, in consequence, adjudged to be degraded from the place she at present occupied in the immaculate coterie into which Lady Hardy had so kindly introduced her.

The dreadful sentence of banishment from what these venerable matrons styled *good company*, was denounced in form by Lady Blast; who, after signifying the decree in writing to Miss Villiers's protectress, Lady Hardy, proceeded to dissolve the assembly.

The benevolent sisterhood, having hurried down their chocolate, dispersed different ways to publish the award of the court, and, to do their *possible*, that from this instant, *nobody should let Miss Villiers in*.

CHAP.

CH A P. VI.

ABSORBED in her fairy dream, and insensible to every object but Lord Melville, and her coronet, Maria walked in air.

The crisis so ardently wished was at hand; she was arrived at the smiling summit of hope.

A thousand gay fancies of happiness, the delusive offspring of credulity and expectation, chased each other, in her imagination, like the ever-varying tints of the dawn.

The door opened: she started from her reverie, on John's announcing Mr. Hammond.

The

The amiable old man advanced; a new source of pleasure opened on her mind; he could only come to bring her an answer in respect to her tragedy.

Certain of success in this interesting point, she did not observe the traces of disappointment on his countenance.

But his narrative, which we recommend to the perusal of all young votaries of the Dramatic Muse, will appear to most advantage in a separate Chapter.

C H A P. VII.

“**I**N obedience to your commands, I am, I sent your tragedy to the acting manager the very day I had the honour of attending you before.

“ I accom-

"I accompanied the packet with a letter,
 "requesting him to read the play, which
 "was written by a friend for whose success
 "I was as anxious as I should be for my
 "own, with attention; and to give me his
 "decisive answer this morning; when I in-
 "tended to have the pleasure of calling on
 "him to receive it.

"I went accordingly at eleven, the hour
 "which I supposed would be most conve-
 "nient to him.

"As he loves to keep on good terms
 "with all authors of reputation who have
 "the complaisance not to write for the
 "theatre, as he has measures to keep with
 "me on account of some of my connexions,
 "and as he knows enough of my temper to
 "be assured it is not calculated for attend-
 "ance, I was admitted the moment I sent
 "up my name.

B I I

"I found

"I found him furrounded by a train of
 "anxious expectants, for some of whom I
 "felt the strongest compassion.

"Amongst the rest I saw—but I forbear
 "his respectable name : an involuntary sigh
 "escaped me ; I could scarce avoid ex-
 "claiming aloud, Alas ! to what is genius
 "reduced !

"The train which composed this great
 "man's levee all retired on my entrance,
 "when the following conversation took
 "place ; a conversation which will convince
 "you I over-rated my little interest, in sup-
 "posing I could secure your tragedy a can-
 "did reading."

"My good sir, I am happy any thing
 "procures me the pleasure of seeing you—
 "I was talking of you only last week"—

"I am

" I am much obliged to you, fir, but the
" business on which I attend you"—

" Why—a—um—true—this play of
" your friend's—You look amazingly well,
" my dear fir—In short—this play—I should
" be charmed to oblige you—but we are so
" terribly overstocked"—

" I am not to learn that you have many
" applications, and therefore determined to
" wait on you in time—You have read the
" play, I take for granted"—

" Why—a—um—no—not absolutely
" read it—Such a multiplicity of affairs—
" Just skimmed the surface—I—a—
" Will you take any chocolate, my dear
" friend?"

" I have

"I have only this moment breakfasted,
"fir—But to our play."

"True—this play—the writing seems
"not bad—something tender—something
"like sentiment—but not an atom of the
"*vis comica*."

"In a tragedy, my good fir?"

"I beg pardon: I protest I had forgot—
"I was thinking of Mr. What-d'ye-call-
"um's comedy, which he left with me last
"Tuesday.

"But why tragedy? why not write co-
"medy? There are real sorrows enough in
"life without going to seek them at the
"theatre—Tragedy does not please as it
"used to do, I assure you, fir.

"Your

"You see I scarce ever play tragedy
"now? The public taste is quite changed
"within these three or four years?"

"Yet Braganza—

"A lucky hit, I confess—something well
"in the last scene—But as I was saying,
"fir—your friend's play—there are good
"lines—But—the fable—the manners—
"the conduct—people imagine—if authors
"would be directed—but they are an in-
"corrigible race---

"Ah! Mr. Hammond! we have no wri-
"ters now---there was a time---your Shakef-
"peares and old Bens--If your friend would
"call on me, I could propose a piece for
"him to *alter*, which perhaps"---

"My commission, sir, does not extend
"beyond the tragedy in question; there-
"fore we will, if you please, return to
"that."

"Be so good, my dear sir, as to reach me
"the gentleman's play: it lies under the
"right-hand pillow of the sofa."

"He took the play, which was still
"in the cover in which I had sent it,
"and it was easy to see had never been
"opened."

"He turned over the leaves with an air
"of the most stoical inattention, and pro-
"ceeded:

"There is a kind of a—sort of a—
"smattering of genius in this production,
"which

“ which convinces me the writer, with pro-
“ per advice, might come to something in
“ time.

“ But these authors—and after all, what
“ do they do? They bring the meat indeed,
“ but who instructs them how to cook it?
“ Who points out the proper seasoning for
“ the dramatic ragoût? Who furnishes the
“ flavoury ingredients to make the dish pa-
“ latable? Who brings the Attic salt?—the
“ Cayenne pepper?—the—the—a—’Tis
“ amazing the pains I am forced to take
“ with these people, in order to give relish
“ to their insipid productions”—

“ I have no doubt of all this, sir; but
“ the morning is wearing away.

“ You have many avocations, and I
“ would not take up your time; I have only
“ one word to add to what I have said: I
“ know we are too late for the present sea-

“son; but you will oblige me infinitely if
“you will make room for this piece in the
“course of the next.”

“The next season, my dear sir!—why—
“a—it is absolutely impossible—I have now
“six-and-twenty new tragedies on my pro-
“mise-list—besides, I have not read it?—
“That is—if—if—a—your friend will
“send it me in July—if I approve it in
“July, I will endeavour—let me see—what
“year is this?—O, I remember—’tis se-
“venty-five—Yes—if I think it will do, I
“will endeavour to bring it out in the win-
“ter of—the winter of—eighty-two.

“That is, if my partner—if Mr. —
“should have made no engagement, un-
“known to me, for that year, which may
“put it out of my power.”

“I wished him a good morning, madam;
“and have brought back your tragedy.

“I have

“ I have related the conversation literally,
 “ on which you are to make your own re-
 “ flections : whatever may be your future
 “ determination, you will find me always
 “ ready to execute your commands.”



CHAP. VIII.

THE lively red in the cheek of Maria
 went and returned a thousand times
 in the course of this narration ; her heart
 beat thick with contrary passions ; fear, a
 faint ray of hope, uncertainty, disappoint-
 ment, indignation, took their turns ; the
 latter at length prevailed, and enabled her
 to bear this unexpected stroke with becom-
 ing spirit.

She repressed the tear which was ready to start, the tear of blended resentment and distress.

She determined to make no further application to the theatres till she should glitter in the gay circle as Lady Melville; and the moment that event, which could not be far distant, should take place, to make a present of her piece to the other house; letting the manager who had treated her so contemptuously know, *whose* play it was he had not condescended to read.

Elated with this idea, she thanked Mr. Hammond for the unpleasing step he had taken in the hope of serving her; and replaced the unfortunate tragedy in her bureau, with an air of tranquillity which effectually deceived him.

He

He was now convinced of what he had before, from her apparent anxiety, a little doubted, that fame was the only object she had in view, and that no inconvenience would arise from her waiting a more favourable moment.

Perfectly at ease in this point, he proceeded to give her his opinion on the general subject of writing for the theatre; a pursuit in which her sex, her delicacy of mind, her rectitude of heart, her honest pride, and perhaps her genius, were all strongly against her success.

He advised her to keep her piece—not nine years, but till more liberal maxims of government should take place in the important empire of the theatre; an empire on the faithful administration of which depended, not only national taste, but in a great degree national virtue.

“ The incoherent jumble of words with-
“ out ideas, which I have been repeating to
“ you, madam,” pursued he, “ is, I am
“ told, the general answer to dramatic wri-
“ ters, who are intended to be disgusted by
“ this unworthy treatment, which the ma-
“ nagers honour with the name of policy,
“ from thinking of any future applica-
“ tions.

“ That vulgar, unenlightened, minds
“ should act with this wretched imitation
“ of craft (for even craft is here too re-
“ spectable an appellation), I should natu-
“ rally expect; but that a man of excellent
“ understanding, of the most distinguished
“ talents, the idol of the public; with as
“ much fame as his most ardent wishes can
“ aspire to, and more riches than he knows
“ how to enjoy; should descend to such
“ contemptible arts, with no nobler a view
“ than that of robbing the Dramatic Muse,
“ to

“to whom he owes that fame and those
“riches, of her little share of the reward, is
“a truth almost too improbable to be be-
“lieved.

“Would it not have been wiser, as well
“as more manly, to have said, in the clear-
“est and most unambiguous terms,”

“Sir, we have no occasion for new pieces
“while there are only two English theatres
“in a city so extensive and opulent as Lon-
“don; a city which, in the time of Eliza-
“beth, when the frequenters of the theatre
“were not a tenth part of the present, sup-
“ported seventeen.

“We will therefore never receive any
“new production but when we are com-
“pelled to it by recommendations which
“we dare not refuse: nor will I read the
“tragedy you bring, lest its merit should
“make me ashamed to reject it.”

“ This would have been indeed the lan-
“ guage of a thankless son of the drama;
“ the language of a man having no object
“ in view but his own emolument, and want-
“ ing gratitude to that publick, and to that
“ beautiful art, to which he was so much
“ indebted; but it would have been the
“ language of a man, and a man possessed of
“ sufficient courage to avow his principle
“ of action.

“ Indulge me a moment longer. The
“ person, of whom I have been speaking,
“ deserves, in his profession, all the praise
“ we can bestow : he has thrown new lights
“ on the science of action, and has, per-
“ haps, reached the summit of theatrical
“ perfection.

“ I say *perhaps*, because there is no limit-
“ ing the powers of the human mind, or
“ saying where it will stop.

“ It

“ It is possible he may be excelled,
 “ though that he may be equalled is rather
 “ to be wished than expected, whenever (if
 “ that time ever comes) his retiring shall
 “ leave the field open to that emulation
 “ which both his merit and his management
 “ have contributed to extinguish.

“ I repeat, that, as an actor, the publick
 “ have scarce more to wish than to see him
 “ equalled ; as an author, he is not devoid
 “ of merit ; as a manager, he has, I am
 “ afraid, ever seen the dawn of excellence,
 “ both in those who aspired to write for, or
 “ to tread, the theatre, with a reluctant
 “ eye ; and has made it too much his ob-
 “ ject, if common sense, aided by impartial
 “ observation, is not deceived, “ To blast
 “ each rising literary blossom, and plant
 “ thorns round the pillow of genius*.”

On

* Long after the above Chapter was written, but before it was committed to the press, this great theatri-

On a favourite theme the garrulous old man would have expatiated much longer, had he not observed an air of impatience in Miss Villiers, who was not inclined to attend to reasoning, on a subject where both her passions and her interest were so much concerned. He therefore took leave, and promised to call on her again in a day or two.

cal luminary disappeared from his orbit. As the writer honours his talents, though she disapproves his illiberal maxims of government, she has unaffected pleasure in predicting, that the various excellencies of his performance will be remembered with delight, when the errors of his management, though fatal to literature, shall be consigned to oblivion.

She wishes him a calm and honourable retreat under the shade of his own laurels: laurels which Candour will exult in twining round his brow, and proclaim to have been fairly won.

May she be here indulged in a wish, which she almost ventures to call a prediction, that the dramatic Muse may again raise her head; and new Shakespeares, new Sophocleses, new Garricks, arise, under the auspices of a manager who has sufficient genius to be above envy, and sufficient liberality of mind to be incapable of avarice?

CHAP.

C H A P. IX.

GRATEFUL as Miss Villiers really was for Mr. Hammond's very friendly interposition in favour of her tragedy, she was not perfectly satisfied with his mode of application.

He had depended too much on himself, and on his supposed interest with the acting manager.

He had, besides, even from his own account, conversed with this gentleman in a style far removed from the persuasive, and not a little tending towards the dictatorial.

After all, the manager might not be so much to blame.

Mr.

Mr. Hammond had neglected advert-
ing to two circumstances, which appeared to her
of infinitely more importance to her success
than the protection of fifty peevish old fel-
lows like himself.

The circumstances he had thus injudi-
ciously omitted to mention, would naturally
have had great weight with a man of ge-
nius, who as such could not fail of being a
man of delicate and refined gallantry, and
a zealous partizan of female excellence.

He should have urged, that the piece in
question was the production of a woman
[he might, without the imputation of flat-
tery, have added, of a young and amiable
woman, of family and unblemished charac-
ter], and that the part of the heroine was
exquisitely adapted to display in full light
the brilliant powers of the actresses who filled
the first characters at his theatre.

She had hinted both these particulars to
Mr. Hammond the first time he had at-
tended.

tended her on this business; but a sarcastical smile of disapprobation had prevented her entering further into the subject.

The truth is, he declined using those arguments, because he thought them both extremely unfavourable to the cause.

She was not quite clear she had acted wisely in consulting *this* Mr. Hammond; he might be a very good kind of man, but apparently ignorant of the world; nor did she find that he was a man *anybody* knew.

He was splenetic, fretful; and she could not help believing, from the severe style in which he spoke of theatrical direction in general, that he had, in the early part of his life, been a candidate, and an unsuccessful one, for the dramatic laurel.

In this, however, she was mistaken; as she was in imagining she knew the world better.

better than a man who had passed all his life, and that life not a short one, in the first company of which it is composed.

He had not indeed the honour of being of a *certain set*; but there were coteries rather more estimable, where his merit received the most flattering distinctions.

But to return to Miss Villiers.

She now wished ardently she had pursued her first plan, of writing to, or seeing, the manager herself; she was certain she should have succeeded better; nor should she, in that case, have been without hopes of prevailing on this great actor to perform the character in her piece which she had written on purpose for him.

It was however too late to take this step, and therefore regret was folly.

She

She had judged ill in trusting this important affair to a stranger, but no matter—Lady Melville's play would undoubtedly be *received*, though Miss Villiers's had not even been *read*.

She could not recollect this last humiliating circumstance without feeling her resentment against the manager revive.

The blush of anger had not left her cheek, when Lord Melville, unexpectedly, entered the room.

His Lordship, who had been riding in Hyde Park, had there met the lovely Lady B—, who had insisted so earnestly, before twenty of the most fashionable people in town, on his meeting her at Almack's on Thursday evening, that he must have lost all reputation as a gallant man had he refused.

Not

Not that he had the least inclination for Lady B—, or she for him: on the contrary, she was strongly suspected of giving the preference to her Lord; but she was amazingly *the ton*, and therefore to be distinguished by her was of the utmost consequence.

What was to be done in this perplexing situation? To have postponed an assignation, would have been as great a solecism in gallantry as to have refused Lady B—'s challenge: to anticipate it, would have a much better air.

He settled it with himself, to call on Miss Villiers before he went home; to dissemble a little impatience, and to prevail on her, if possible, to change the time she had fixed for their *tete-a-tete*, and permit him to sup with her the approaching evening, after the opera.

He

He addressed her with that persuasive easy grace so natural to him on all occasions, and so extremely useful on most, and found very little difficulty in carrying his point.

Her present situation, setting her love aside, made procrastination extremely inconvenient to her: she had failed in one of her great pursuits; it was therefore indispensably requisite she should be clearly informed what she had to expect as to the other; and an eclaircissement, though her modesty would have deferred it, could not arrive too soon.

Lord Melville returned home to dress; and Maria sent for Mrs. Merrick up stairs, to order her supper.

She explained herself no farther than by saying, she should have a friend to sup with her, and desiring to have the table set out with elegance.

Mrs.

Mrs. Merrick supposed the expected guest to be Lady Hardy, who had more than once supped with our heroine before; but had too much respect for her young lady (so she always called Miss Villiers) to ask the question.

She withdrew, to make the necessary arrangements for the evening; and Miss Villiers retired to her dressing-room, to prepare for the most important hour of her life; an hour, on the events of which depended the good or ill of her whole future days; an hour, which was to decide whether she was destined to be the most wretched, or the most happy, of womankind.

Sanguine as she naturally was, the disappointment of the morning had a little abated her presumption.

She

She had been, in idea, quite as certain of success in the one point as in the other; and yet she had failed.

But then—there was a very essential difference—She was a stranger to the manager, and it was therefore easy to mistake his character and turn of thinking.

She had supposed (and she might perhaps, if any manager had elevation of mind sufficient to try the experiment, be justified in this seemingly Utopian idea), that the director of a theatre must at the same time taste the most refined pleasure, and reap the most permanent advantage, in encouraging genius and gratifying the publick, by giving pieces of superior excellence, without regard to any consideration but that excellence itself.

On

On this supposition, after Mr. Hammond's very favourable judgement of her tragedy, she had looked on it as certain it would be received.

She had therefore only formed illusive expectations by the commonest error in the world ; that of reasoning right on principles which, unhappily, were wrong.

In respect to Lord Melvile the case was very different ; she was almost as well acquainted with his heart as with her own.

Could that countenance deceive—But away with suspicion—Lord Melvile's mind was as faultless as his form.

His soul was an emanation of the divinity : a lively image of the *first good, first perfect, and first fair*.

Besides,

Besides, on this interesting occasion, her own opinion, or rather her own heart, was to direct her conduct.

Mr. Hammond, with his chilling, suspicious, superannuated policy, had, thank heaven! nothing to do in this affair.

Her hair-dresser interrupted this train of reflections : he was desired to exert his utmost skill ; he obeyed, but she was far from being satisfied : he had never dressed her so well, yet never found it so impossible to please.

His work finished, he observed, with a very respectful bow, that her ladyship had had the goodness to order her bill ; he should not have taken the liberty to remind her of this, had he not been in great distress to make up a payment the next morning.

Both

Both her own temper, and the education given her by Col. Dormer, had inspired her with the laudable pride of disdaining to be in debt.

She therefore paid him, however inconvenient, and found she had only twenty pounds remaining.

She had still an hundred and twenty to pay, the greater part of which she every moment expected to be asked for.

She repented having been so precipitate in calling in her bills.

Yet it was necessary to form some judgment of her situation in respect to money; and who could have supposed her tragedy would not have been received?

Alas!

Alas! the ideal source of wealth, on which she had so fondly relied, was no more!

She did not dare to think—should Lord Melville deceive her—But it was a degree of sacrilege even to suppose it possible—

At all events she determined on a truce with care for the approaching evening.

So disinterested a lover deserved that she should meet him drest in smiles.

The day past on; my reader will judge of her anxiety.

She dined; that is, she sat down to table—she drank tea—the hours past heavily along.

She traversed her apartment, she changed her seat a thousand times; she attempted to read—the book might have been Greek—

Ten o'clock came; he had promised not to stay the whole opera—the watchman went the half hour—she had never known half an hour so long—eleven—she looked peevishly at her watch—at a quarter past eleven, Lord Melville made his appearance—

A thousand apologies—the croud—his carriage could not get up—he had met with ladies in distress in the passage, and could not refuse his assistance—Nothing was ever so unlucky—She might judge what must have been his impatience—

He presented her with a *bouquet* of roses from his father's villa in Kent, praised her dress, and told her all the little anecdotes of the opera.

She

She talked too, as soon as that mixture of anxiety and diffidence, which had taken possession of her on Lord Melville's entrance, would give her leave.

She talked—good gods! how she talked! Could he be otherwise than charmed!—she talked of him.

She praised his dress; every thing he wore was so exquisitely fancied.

He was in all so superior to other men!

She flattered, without herself perceiving it, his taste, his understanding, his politeness, his knowledge of the world, his refined connoisseurship in the elegant arts.

He was enchanted—with the subject at least.

He listened to her with the most gentle complacency, found she had infinite wit, though she had not yet said one word which merited such an appellation; and applauded himself for having once made a choice for which he should not have occasion to blush.

He repaid her in kind the incense she so liberally bestowed; the conversation was consequently pretty dull, and, as it could entertain only themselves, may be omitted without any loss to the reader.

This mild, inoffensive chit-chat filled up the interval, a very short one, between his lordship's arrival, and the appearance of supper.

They sat down; Lord Melville ate amazingly, found every thing excellent, asked if her cook was French, and was with difficulty convinced of the contrary.

Mrs. Merrick had really this evening surpassed herself; and she was by no means unlettered in the fashionable science of good eating.

Miss Villiers, inebriated with the pleasing hope of finding Lord Melville the man of honour she had always believed him, and happy at seeing him appear pleased with her entertainment, forgot the important crisis of her fate was arrived.

She forgot that her future life must probably take its colour from the hour that was on the wing; and found her anxiety, before the supper was ended, give way to modest confidence and convivial delight.

She recovered that chearful ease, that something above serenity, which is so absolutely necessary to render our social mo-

ments pleasing ; and gave way, by degrees, to all the natural vivacity of her temper.

The bewitching melody of her voice ; the softness of her manner ; that lovely femininity so conspicuously wanting in his Dorigon ; her sprightly sallies, chastised by delicacy and good-breeding ; commanded Lord Melville's admiration through all his *sang froid*, and threw a new lustre round the attractive graces of her person.

Poisoned as his taste unhappily was by the boundless licence of vicious conversation, he yet found a thousand unexpected charms in that of our heroine.

He even found her amusing, of which till this moment he had not conceived the remotest idea.

As his self-love was gratified to its utmost extent by her very assiduous attention

to

to please, by her smiles of undissembled affection (for she really loved him), it found its account almost as much in her perfections as in his own; and he therefore contemplated them with almost equal satisfaction.

He had, he was convinced, nothing to fear from avowing his design, therefore why not avow it? He even fancied she expected a proposal of the kind which he intended making.

Her tenderness for him was too evident to be mistaken.

Yet, strange as it may seem to some of our readers, that very tenderness, which merited the utmost delicacy on his part; her unaffected modesty; the elegance of her manners; her apparent innocence (whether real or assumed he was not at present able to determine); all together awed

him into a temporary silence on the subject which had occasioned his visit.

He talked of love, it is true; but it was in such general terms as could not have alarmed the most scrupulous, the most apprehensive virtue; in such terms as confirmed Maria in the unhappy delusion which had betrayed her into the imprudent part she was unfortunately acting.



C H A P. X.

THEY had supped, the conversation was beginning to grow interesting.

Lord Melville, after a thousand protestations of the most sincere attachment, had gone so far as to declare that the happiness of his future life depended entirely on passing it with her.

He

He had proceeded, in expressions which were rather equivocal, to offer her *carte blanche* in respect to settlements.

As her idea of the word settlement differed very essentially from his lordship's, she looked on their marriage as concluded, and could with difficulty restrain the transports of her heart.

She blushed, looked abashed, dropped a tear of mixed tenderness and gratitude, and was for some time unable to speak.

She at last assumed sufficient courage to tell him, though with hesitation, that she had the most lively sense of his lordship's generosity and nobleness of sentiment; but that she loved him for himself alone, and was indifferent to every other consideration.

As he looked on these as words of course, which meant nothing, he pressed her to be more explicit.

She was going to refer him to Col. Dormer for an answer, when the door opened, and a very genteel man, about twenty-five, in regimentals, entered the room, with an air of the most perfect ease and unconcern, humming a part of one of the favourite songs in Montezuma.

He stopped short, appeared confused, looked round with astonishment, and, addressing Maria with the most respectful air, attempted to apologize for an intrusion which he had not intended.

“Can you forgive me, madam? I found
“the street-door open, and mistook it for
“my own apartment, which is in the next
“house.

“I am

"I am ashamed of my indiscretion, but
"you have nothing to fear from it."

He hurried down, after he had said this,
without waiting for an answer.

Neither Miss Villiers nor Lord Melville
could speak; they were both petrified with
surprise.

His lordship's was, however, a surprise
mixed with uncertainty and chagrin.

He knew not how to give credit to the
stranger's story of mistaking the house; it
was very improbable, to say no more.

He might be a lover, and a favoured
one; or, at least, one who had been fa-
voured, and was still in the list of her
friends.

His familiar manner of entering the room, his unembarrassed address to Maria, his retiring without waiting an answer, gave Lord Melville, who had been taught to think ill of the human heart, suspicions still more injurious to both.

He even fancied, and how creative is fancy! that he had seen mutual glances of intelligence.

He thought it more than possible he was in danger of becoming a dupe to the most infamous artifice; and that Maria, in her seeming attachment to him, had been only acting an assumed character, in order to deceive.

His vanity combated, but could not conquer, this very mortifying idea.

Unable to recover his good-humour, or to resolve in what manner to take this extraordinary

traordinary adventure, he found it impossible, and indeed he thought it impolitic, to resume the conversation.

Miss Villiers, who was still more disconcerted, without having merited to be at all so, had an air of perplexity and self-condemnation, which added strength to Lord Melville's suspicions.

She was much more at a loss than his lordship, how to behave in so uncommon a conjuncture.

The confusion she felt on the stranger's entering the room, gave her the first idea of her own imprudence in allowing Lord Melville's midnight visit.

The stranger's apology for his intrusion, though apparently respectful, shewed too plainly the light in which he regarded the party.

She

She was alarmed, she was determined to be more guarded for the future; she entreated Lord Melville to retire.

She was not without apprehension as to the continuance of his esteem.

She dreaded losing his good opinion by that very indiscretion of which her too great anxiety to oblige him had been the sole cause.

The delicacy inseparable from real affection taught her to be the more careful of her own honour because it was soon to be his.

In short, without knowing well how to develop her ideas, she found them crowd upon her too fast for expression; nor indeed were they such as she would have chosen indiscriminately to communicate.

The

The continuity of the scene being broken by this unexpected event, and both feeling an embarrassment which made it very difficult to recover the thread of their discourse; each found a thousand plausible reasons for separating, and deferring the subject, on which they were just entering, to another opportunity.

His lordship's politeness, however, and that art which he had taken so much pains to acquire, got so entirely the better of his displeasure, that he left her without her entertaining the slightest suspicion that he attributed to her any share in this mysterious adventure.

He was really extremely at a loss, as well how to determine on this important point, as how to form a just idea of her general character.

He

He hesitated whether to pronounce her the most artless, or the most designing, of her sex.

As he very naturally, in which we wish he had more imitators, looked on his father as his firmest friend, and the person most interested in his happiness, he with great prudence resolved to suspend the present negotiation till Lord Claremont's return to town; to give his lordship, without disguise or palliation, a circumstantial relation of the whole transaction, so far as it had already gone; and to ask his advice whether he ought, in common discretion, to resume, or to relinquish, his pursuit of our heroine.

THE

He hesitated whether to pronounce her
the most wretched, or the most deserving, of
her fate.

THE EXCURSION.

B O O K VI.

THE EXCURSION

BOOK VI

CHAPTER I

WHEN Mrs. Villiers rose in the morning, she found Mrs. Merrick in her dining-room waiting her coming, in order to attend herself, as she sometimes did, during breakfast.

The

The grave sin of this good woman

kindness of manner, in the way with

Very well, I thank you, madam

THE EXCURSION

But what, Mrs. Merrick? You gone

only meet with smiles

BOOK VI.

I am a little uneasy

Is your uneasiness any thing I can re-

move

CHAP. I.

Sure enough you can, my dear young

WHEN Miss Villiers rose in the morn-
ing, she found Mrs. Merrick in her
dining-room waiting her coming, in order
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ing breakfast.

the liberty, which her long and faithful at-

eachment

The

The grave air of this good woman alarmed her; she enquired, with the utmost kindness of manner, if she was well.

"Very well, I thank you, madam; but—"

"But what, Mrs. Merrick? You generally meet with smiles."

"I am a little uneasy"—

"Is your uneasiness any thing I can remove?"

"Sure enough you can, my dear young lady, for it is entirely on your account."

After fifty apologies, and as many protestations that it was the first time in her life she ever thought her in the wrong, she took the liberty, which her long and faithful attachment

tachment to the family of Miss Villiers rendered justifiable, of remonstrating gently on the indiscreet party of the night before, and its probable ill consequences to her reputation, and of course to her happiness.

She placed the impropriety of this supper in so strong a light, that Maria, who had the utmost indulgence for her, in order to remove her anxiety, confessed to her, but under the strictest injunctions of secrecy, that she was in a very short time to be married to Lord Melville.

She added, that Lord Melville's motive for this seemingly ill-timed visit, was to consult her, without interruption, on the necessary settlements to be made on this interesting occasion; and that he chose the evening as the most certain time to find her without company.

She

She desired her to be under no apprehension of her displeasure; assured her she did not blame her, ignorant as she was of the only circumstance which could render her excusable, for thinking the party indiscreet.

She however told her, she expected, after such a proof of her unlimited confidence, that, whatever visits she might in future have occasion to receive from Lord Melville, she should rest satisfied with the propriety of her conduct; which ever had been, and ever should be, regulated by the most punctilious rules of virtue and honour.

She proceeded to inform her, that she should in a post or two, which was really her intention, write to entreat Col. Dormer to come to town, in order to arrange the preliminaries of this marriage with Lord Claremont.

Mrs.

Mrs. Merrick, who thought there was no alliance to which her young lady had not a right to pretend; who knew her incapable of even the shadow of falsehood; and who had, from his beauty to which women are always partial, and his affability for which all the world have the same prepossession, a strong inclination to think highly of Lord Melvile; was almost out of her senses with pleasure, on receiving this unexpected intelligence.

She made Miss Villiers a thousand congratulatory curtsies, wished her joy almost as often, promised her the most inviolable secrecy, and hastened down to communicate this good news, having first exacted a solemn engagement that it should go no further, to her brother, a very honest tradesman in the neighbourhood, who happened to be then in the house.

She

She looked on this as no breach of confidence in respect to Miss Villiers; because, in the first place, it did not go out of the family; and because, in the second, she knew her brother to be an adept in the art of keeping secrets, having been, in his youth, for several years, the favourite domestic of one of the clerks in one of the most important of the public offices.

She was a woman of honour, and would not have betrayed her young lady for the world; but she knew the secret was as safe with her brother as with herself; for which supposition every reader, who is not unreasonable indeed, will certainly give her credit.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

THE hours passed heavily on with our heroine the next three days.

She heard nothing of Lord Melville; and would not venture to make a visit, lest he should unluckily call during her absence.

As the moments of expectation are not the pleasantest that can be conceived, she determined, as she was sitting at breakfast the fourth day, to go that evening to a rout, for which she had received a card three weeks before.

She resolved however not to play, because she had scarce money sufficient for one stake; but she could no longer support her own society; and some sort of dissipation

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was become absolutely necessary to relieve an anxiety rendered more exquisite by the natural warmth and impatience of her temper.

She was dressing for this purpose, when her French milliner, who had just been at Lady Blast's, where she had heard some circumstances not too favourable to our heroine, burst abruptly into the room, and, with an air and manner to which Miss Villiers had not been accustomed, demanded instant payment of her bill.

To pay her from the slender remains of her own finances was impossible; not to pay her was distraction.

In this tumult of her mind, hurried away by honest pride and indignation, she took a step which that very pride would at any other moment have infallibly prevented.

She

She sat down, and wrote a note to Lady Hardy, in which, after apologizing for trespassing on her friendship, of which she had already received so many striking proofs, she entreated her ladyship, till she could order a remittance from the country, to lend her an hundred pounds, for which she had an unexpected and immediate occasion.

She added, that, being perfectly acquainted with the nobleness of her ladyship's sentiments, she knew she was laying her under a distinguished obligation by making a request which gave her an opportunity of evincing the sincerity of her regard, and of those obliging offers of service so often repeated.

She observed further, that this request was the strongest mark she could give of her esteem for her ladyship's amiable virtues; and concluded by reminding her, that,

amongst real friends, the greatest delicacy, in points of this nature, consisted in having no delicacy at all.

At the moment when Lady Hardy received this sentimental epistle, she was deliberating with herself whether to support Miss Villiers, and enter a caveat against Lady Blast's whole proceeding; or absolutely to give up her acquaintance, and acquiesce in the sentence of the venerable court of dowagers.

In other words, she was balancing in her own mind the arguments for and against our heroine's ever becoming Lady Melville.

This letter removed every shadow of doubt, and operated like magic in making the unfavourable scale preponderate.

She called up Miss Villiers's new footman, who happened to be the bearer of the letter,

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letter, and who, my reader may remember, had been recommended by herself.

“ Pray, Harry, is your lady out of her
“ senses !”

Harry bowed, and smiled.

“ I should soon be in a fine way indeed,
“ if I was to lend my money to every little
“ adventurer”—

Harry looked grave—

“ Do not be uneasy, Harry : I will get
“ you a better place, or perhaps take you
“ myself.

“ In the mean time, you will extremely
“ oblige me, if you will tell me all you know
“ of this girl, by whom I have been shame-
“ fully taken-in.”

A conversation ensued, in the course of which Harry related the anecdote of the supper, without subtracting the minutest circumstance.

He finished his narrative by informing her ladyship, that though he had no doubt of Miss Villiers's having been kept by Lord Melville, yet he was inclined to believe the affair was entirely over, and that his lordship had very prudently left her to make her reflections on an adventure with which he had had so much reason to be displeased.

He added, that he apprehended his lordship was jealous of the strange gentleman, and very probably not without reason.

Just as Harry concluded his very accurate string of observations, Lady Blaft was announced.

CH. VI.

She

She came to demand a categorical answer to her letter containing Miss Villiers's sentence, and could not have arrived in a more fortunate moment.

Lady Hardy ordered Harry to stay: the history of our unfortunate heroine was recommenced, with which Lady Blast was so infinitely delighted, that she agreed to take Harry, who she observed appeared to be a very intelligent, honest, pretty, young fellow, into her service, as soon as he could get his *congé*; and to give him one third more wages than he had agreed for with Miss Villiers.

After a short consultation it was settled, that Harry should return, and say he had not found Lady Hardy at home.

C H A P. III.

THE long absence of the servant left Miss Villiers without a doubt of having succeeded in her application to her *friend*.

Harry at length appeared, and informed her, that Lady Hardy was abroad, and was not expected home till midnight.

Though her confidence in her *friend* was not abated, yet her disappointment at this information was extreme.

She asked Harry peevishly why, if Lady Hardy was out, he had made so long a stay; he made an impertinent answer; she told him, with a haughty air, he was from that moment discharged her service; he returned the reply valiant, " That he did
" not

Chap. III. THE EXCURSION. 81

“not care how soon :” the bell was rung for John, who was ordered to pay him the little wages due, and to discharge him.

This extraordinary scene did not add to the civility of the French milliner.

She renewed her solicitation in pretty lively terms, and Miss Villiers was reduced to the mortifying necessity of desiring her to call for her money the next morning; to which, with a good deal of murmuring, she consented.

The next morning? And how was the next morning to furnish her with the means of keeping this indiscreet promise?

Lady Hardy—a thousand things might happen—What thousand? Her uncle—but could she procure it from her uncle the next morning? Besides, whoever is acquainted with the human heart, and remembers how

the wrung from him his reluctant consent to this journey, will know her uncle would be indeed her last resource.

She was however convinced she should get the money in time, though it was impossible to divine how.

A thought started; this rout—she had still twenty pounds remaining; she owed the milliner fifty; thirty was not much to win—she was determined to try—

This was a *possible* resource; she desired no more; her sanguine temper elevated it to a *certain* one.

She might even gain a much larger sum: she might be enabled to pay all she owed: she had seen people win a vast deal more at guinea quadrille, at which she determined to engage.

She

She dressed, and went to Mrs. Harwood's assembly.

The lady of the house, prepossessed by the malevolent misrepresentations of Lady Hardy and Lady Blast, the former of whom had just been apologizing for having ever introduced *this little adventurer* (so she styled her), to her acquaintance, received her with a cold constrained civility, which a mind less ardent than hers would have seen in a moment.

Warm, unsuspecting, a little vain, and justly conscious of having a right to those unmeaning, yet agreeable, attentions which constitute the bond of mixed society, she had not an idea of their being omitted in her regard; the omission therefore must have been glaring indeed, if she had observed it.

Nor was Mrs. Harwood, who was a woman of great good-nature, capable of shocking any person who was her guest; and, though she determined, in what she supposed justice to herself, never to give Miss Villiers another invitation, yet she humanely resolved to drop her acquaintance in the quietest and most imperceptible manner possible.

As Maria passed through the apartments, she saw several ladies at whose houses she had visited with Lady Hardy; one or two half returned her curtsy; but the greater part looked full in her face, without betraying the smallest consciousness of having ever seen her before.

She was astonished how to account for this general want of memory in the ladies, when, turning her head, she observed Lady Hardy and Lady Blast in close consultation,

in

in a part of the room which she could not avoid passing by, in order to enter the next.

Lady Hardy held a paper in her hand, which she was reading in a low voice to Lady Blast, and which seemed to afford infinite entertainment to this amiable pair.

On approaching them, Miss Villiers, to her great astonishment, discovered the paper, which had so much amused them, to be her own letter to Lady Hardy, requesting her to lend her an hundred pounds.

She now, for the first time, saw Lady Hardy in the light she merited; and, trembling with surprize and resentment, was going to express her sense of this infamous treatment with the spirit it deserved, when both ladies turned full upon her, burst into a loud laugh, and, brushing rudely by her, retired into the inner apartment.

This

This insolence, in which nothing but the most abandoned effrontery could have supported them, was more than the lovely victim of their malevolence could bear.

She had, however, the courage to repress the almost starting tear, to struggle with the rising passion which agitated her whole frame, and to assume an appearance of tranquillity which ill-suited the tumultuous emotions of her heart.

She felt the insult strongly, but she felt it with dignity. She approached Mrs. Harwood, and, with an air which was within an atom of haughtiness, related the affront she had received, and from whom.

She added, that she had entered Mrs. Harwood's house, relying on that protection from outrage which politeness and hospitality demanded, and to which both her birth

and character gave her a right; that this right had been violated by two persons whose presence, after such behaviour, dishonoured every circle in which they appeared, and that she must that moment either give up her acquaintance or theirs.

Mrs. Harwood's heart was for our heroine; but her fears enrolled her in the contrary party.

She dreaded those envenomed tongues, from which no innocence was secure; and had the unpardonable weakness, instead of supporting her own honour, which was wounded by this shameful treatment of one who, as her guest, had a right to her protection, to tell Miss Villiers, though in the softest terms possible, that she was mistress of her own conduct, but not of hers.

Maria saw, and pitied, her pusillanimity; and, without making any answer, retired
with

with an air of majestic disdain, which almost
awed slander itself into silence.

She returned home, her heart swelling
with honest indignation.

She sat down; she reflected on the un-
merited insult she had received, and on its
probable consequences; she saw her situa-
tion in its true colours.

She had expended the money she brought
to town, she had incurred debts which she
knew not how to pay.

Even the wretched hope of relieving the
distress of the moment by play, a resource
equally infamous and uncertain, was at an
end.

She saw herself, she knew not why, driven
from the society in which she had lived
since her coming to town, and this in a
manner

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manner the most humiliating that the keenest malice could have contrived.

The French milliner, who had prest her so rudely for money, was to call the next morning.

She was unable to satisfy her; she had every thing mortifying to expect from her resentment on being disappointed.

She had to suffer, what was much worse, the reproaches of her own heart, and the painful consciousness of having broken her word.

The tears, which she had hitherto restrained, now forced their way, and gave some relief to the agonizing sensations of her soul.

The tide of blended passions, by degrees, subsided; she saw the insult she had received,

ceived, and the persons who had offered it, with the contempt they deserved.

Her pecuniary distress was of a more alarming nature; but even there, if she could gain a little time, she had still a variety of resources.

Her mind, recovering its natural tone, became every moment more tranquil and collected.

She ranged the whole expansive region of indulgent fancy for subjects of consolation; nor did she range that expansive region in vain.

The storm indeed was gathering round her, but she saw it unappalled.

She had one of those happy warm imaginations, which through the impending darkening

darkening cloud can pierce the gloom, and discover the radiant blue sky behind.



CHAP. IV.

MISS Villiers rose in the morning with no little heart-ach at the remembrance of her milliner's intended visit.

She had given her word to pay her; she found it impossible to keep it.

She saw no immediate possibility of fulfilling her promise, except by borrowing the money; but of whom?

Her *friend*, her only *friend* in town, had not only refused, but cruelly insulted her temporary distress.

She

She sat down to breakfast; the hour approached; her terrors began to return.

A rap at the door made her start almost from her seat.

Her heart sickened at the idea of seeing this dreaded visitant.

John came up, and delivered her a letter, which he told her was given him by a servant who said it required no answer.

She took it, trembling with the apprehension of other demands.

The writing of the superscription, and the seal, were equally unknown to her.

There is no describing her surprize at finding only a cover, without a single word, enclosing a bank-note for 100/.

Astonishment

Astonishment and joy rendered her motionless.

After a moment's pause, she fell on her knees to thank the Omnipotent Disposer of all for an event of which her feelings told her her imprudence had rendered her unworthy.

She vowed, in the fervid ardour of her gratitude, to merit, by her future conduct, this apparent interposition of Providence in her favour.

She resolved to dismiss her carriage, to retrench her expence, to pay instantly every demand she had incurred.

She almost resolved to return to the happy roof she had so precipitately deserted.

She

She would have quite resolved it, had not Lord Melville's enchanting idea intervened.

It was, however, strange she had seen nothing of him the two or three past days: but a thousand causes unknown to her might have prevented his calling.

His father might be returned, might fill up all his time—She had every reason to depend on the sincerity of his attachment.

But a truce to her reflections—Madame Vipont came, was paid, and John dispatched to discharge all her other bills.

This pleasing task completed, she turned her thoughts towards the unknown friend who had been the instrument of heaven in giving her this well-timed assistance—She could not form a conjecture—

Was

Was it not possible Lady Hardy might have repented her unworthy behaviour, and have sent the money?

It must be so—she knew so few persons—and who else could have supposed she wanted such assistance?

Yet, when she recollected the unfeeling insolence of her behaviour, she found the supposition impossible.

She was bewildering herself in vain, when she received a card from Lord Claremont, desiring to know at what hour that evening he might have the pleasure of waiting on her.

Lord Claremont!—Her joy was now complete.

Every

Every smiling vision of fancy returned.

The gloomy hour of adversity was past.

A brighter æra had commenced with this happy dawn.

She was sorry Col. Dormer was not in town.

Her resolutions of dismissing her carriage, and retrenching her expence, were suspended.

She sent for the friseur, and prepared for this important evening.

We will leave her for a moment to indulge her transports, and enquire what is become of Lord Melville.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

ON returning home on Tuesday night from his evening visit to Miss Villiers, Lord Melville was informed his father was come to town, and had sent a message desiring to see him, to breakfast, at ten the next morning.

He had a strong inclination to have asked the servant whether Mademoiselle Dorigon was returned to town with Lord Claremont; but he felt the weakness of being interested in the question, and was ashamed to betray that weakness even to his servant.

He knew she was not returned to Grosvenor-street; the stillness of all around him sufficiently announced her absence: he was therefore not a little anxious to know how she was disposed of.

He however suspended his curiosity till the morning, when he attended Lord Claremont at the hour appointed.



C H A P. VI.

AFTER the breakfast was finished, and the servants had retired, Lord Claremont entered on the intended subject of this conference, the important business of Dorignon's abdication.

“ You cannot conceive, my dear Melville,
 “ how much I value myself on this nego-
 “ tiation; which, give me leave to say, re-
 “ quired fifty times more dexterity than a
 “ treaty between two crowned heads.

“ Having first made Dorignon the confi-
 “ dante of your intended marriage, and con-
 “ vinced

Chap. VI. THE EXCURSION. 99

“vinced her that she had nothing to expect
“in future from your attachment, I carried my point, by flattering her with the
“hope of marrying our West Indian.

“This hope I am not clear she will not
“be able to reduce to certainty; at least
“if she steadily pursues the plan I have
“taken the pains to trace out for her.

“He is, you well know, just arrived
“from one of the most uncivilized and barbarous
“of our West India Islands, and
“knows about as much of the world as a
“country school-boy of thirteen.

“I have regulated all Dorignon’s future
“measures by the exactest scales of sound
“policy and knowledge of mankind.

“These proposed measures are as much
“calculated for her advantage as your
“safety,

“ safety, though the latter was undoubt-
 “ edly my first principle of action.

“ She is, by my intervention, secured in
 “ a very liberal allowance from this young
 “ man; and I have, unknown to him, pre-
 “ sented her, in your name, with three hun-
 “ dred guineas for her *menus plaisirs*.

“ They are to go abroad immediately;
 “ not to France, because there she is rather
 “ too well known.

“ Not to Italy, because the Italian women
 “ are as amusing, and ten thousand times
 “ handsomer than herself.

“ But they are to make the tour of the
 “ Northern courts, where the cards will be
 “ almost played into her hands.

“ They set out for Vienna to-morrow;
 “ and if the women there are not found
 “ sufficiently

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" sufficiently *ennuieuse*, she may possibly
" proceed to St. Petersburg, in which case
" I look on her business as done.

" She desired to see you before she set
" out; but on this request I thought it ne-
" cessary to put an absolute negative.

" By the way, I am not very discreet in
" mentioning this circumstance.

(Lord Melville sighed.)

" I see, Melville, I was right in my pro-
" hibition; and, to prevent all possibility of
" danger, I will not lose sight of you till
" this happy pair have left London.

" My chaise will be at the door in half
" an hour, and it shall carry us to pay a
" morning-visit to your intended bride, who
" is about twenty miles from town, at her
" father's villa in Surry."

"Your lordship will, I am sure, give me
 "leave to dress."

"By no means: we will only call *en pas-*
sant, as if airing accidentally that way,
 "and make our visit of ceremony to-mor-
 "row.

"Besides, give me leave to observe, that
 "your present *deskabille* is admirably fan-
 "cied, and extremely becoming.

"Without any compliment, my dear
 "Melville, I know nobody who dresses so
 "uniformly well."



CHAP. VII.

THEY set out, and reached Mrs. Har-
 ding's villa about two.

The

The ladies, that is to say, Mrs. Harding, and her daughter, the destined Lady Melville, were in the dressing-room of the latter, who was at her harpsichord when her noble visitants arrived.

Lord Melville entered the house with a reluctance which he was scarce able to conceal.

As he had heard nothing of his bride from Lord Claremont, but that she was rich, he had formed to himself an idea of her the most unpleasing that can be conceived.

His imagination had painted her in the most disgusting colours; and he had only reconciled himself to the marriage by considering the absolute necessity of this step to the emancipation of the family estate.

Full of the idea that the woman one marries for money can have nothing but money to recommend her, he had supposed her ugly, awkward, foolish, ill-bred, ill-dressed, uneducated; in short, a chemical compound of every species of imperfection.

If she had possessed any uncommon advantages, either personal or mental, Lord Claremont would naturally have mentioned (if he had not even exaggerated) these advantages.

Judge then of his astonishment at seeing, in a *deshabille* as elegantly fancied as his own, an extreme pretty little woman, perfectly well made; a brunette, but of the best style; unconstrained, *degagée*, with an air of the world, and a manner as completely French, as if she had never breathed beneath any sky but that of Versailles.

347

She

She addressed him with the most perfect ease, equally remote from English *mauvaise honte*, and unweildy Asiatic self-importance.

Lord Melville, from the information of the harpsichord, thought it necessary to ask her to sing, though he trembled at the idea of her compliance.

Ten minutes sooner, his expectations would have been circumscribed to,

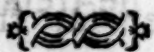
“ Love’s a gentle, generous passion :”

They now rose as high as

“ *Belle Iris.*”

But he was agreeably surprized with one of Trajetta’s most affecting airs, sung, in a *voce di camera* indeed, but with a taste and expression which would have satisfied the master himself, had he been present.

The family pressed their noble visitants to pass the remainder of the week at Harding-Place; to which, having no objection but what either of their valets de chambre, by going to town, could remove, they willingly consented.



CHAP. VIII.

MISS Harding, who found her lover extremely to her taste, laid herself out to please, and she succeeded.

She was not long in discovering vanity to be Lord Melville's predominant passion, and therefore on that side she made her attack.

She made this discovery with the greater facility, as it was the side on which she was herself most peculiarly vulnerable.

Without

Without departing from what she owed to herself, she behaved to him with that insinuating, yet almost imperceptible attention, which supplies the place of every other species of merit, where every other species of merit is wanting.

This was however far from being the case in the present instance.

She had, both from the gifts of nature and those of education, an undoubted right to please.

She had at least her share both of mental and personal perfections.

She had an agreeable figure, an excellent understanding, a thousand striking fashionable accomplishments, and, above all, had sacrificed largely to the Graces.

But the resistless enchantment by which she proposed to bind Lord Melville in silken fetters, was not the power of her own attractions, but the lively sense she should appear to have of his.

For her success in this attack on the heart of Lord Melville, there were many very important reasons to be given, which we will particularize in the next Chapter.



C H A P. IX.

SETTING aside the *agreements* of his intended bride; she could not have found a more favourable interval in which to seduce his inclinations.

He

He had lost Donignon, and was piqued at the equivocal conduct and supposed duplicity of the lovely Maria.

Miss Harding had besides every external advantage over her rivals which her father's almost princely fortune could bestow.

It was not a French opera-girl, a woman of abandoned character, supported by his infatuation; it was not a little unknown adventurer, in a hired lodging, who now solicited his attention; but the heiress of immense wealth, whose attachment must therefore necessarily be disinterested and sincere.

Her dress, her blaze of diamonds, her apartment, her attendants, all spoke rather an Asiatic queen than the daughter of an English private gentleman.

The house was noble, and furnished with all the splendour of Eastern magnificence.

The table was served in the most superb style, and covered with every costly delicacy of every land, and almost of every season; with a profusion of blended French and Oriental luxury.

Excellent music, amusing company, dancing, high play, the latter of which Lord Melville passionately loved, made the hours pass away on rapid pinions.

But amongst all Miss Harding's auxiliaries in her conquest of Lord Melville, none was more powerful in its effects than surprise.

Lord Claremont, who knew the effect of a *coup de main*, had intentionally bounded his praises to the myriads Miss Harding was to bring with her to her husband, without hinting at her possessing one single attractive quality besides.

The

The event justified this precaution.

Had Lord Melville been told she was a pretty woman, very accomplished, and that she sung like an angel, he would have found her a pretty woman, very accomplished, and who sung like an angel; but no more.

Contrasted with the unpleasing idea he had formed of her in consequence of his father's affected silence on the subject, she appeared to him almost a divinity.

His imagination was dazzled; he forgot Miss Villiers, or remembered her only to feel himself embarrassed by the recollection.

In short, this star of the East had, ere four days had fully elapsed, by flattering his self-love, and leading him through a round of the most animated amusements, convinced

convinced him of the absurdity of his projected arrangement with Miss Villiers, and determined him to put a stop to the treaty.

“Why keep, and at a heavy expence, a
 “mistress who threatened, from her tiresome
 “affectation of sentiment, to be as *ennuieuse*
 “as a wife; when a wife was happily selected
 “for him by a father he wished to oblige,
 “who, besides bringing great riches into the
 “family, promised, from her talents and *en-*
 “jouement, to be as amusing as a mistress?”

“Many a man of fashion had married the
 “woman he had kept: why not strike out
 “a different path, and keep the woman one
 “marries?”

“Keep one’s wife! It would be droll—
 “but it would be new—And is there a
 “charm in human life equal to novelty?”

Thus

Thus reasoned Lord Melville, as he was dressing on Saturday morning.

C H A P. X.

HE communicated this idea to Lord Claremont, who came into the room just as the arduous business of the toilet was finished, and was beyond measure pleased with a plan which promised many family advantages.

Lord Melville proceeded to inform his indulgent parent of his situation in respect to Miss Villiers, and of the offers he was proceeding to make her, when the extraordinary adventure of the stranger threw a damp on his beginning attachment.

He

He desired his lordship's opinion and assistance in respect to this lady, for whom he now felt not the least shadow of inclination, but who would have reason to think him a man without the least sense of honour or of gallantry, if he did not come to an explanation on a treaty which was in so advanced a state.

Lord Claremont kindly undertook the task of seeing our heroine, and of putting an absolute period to this languid and unmeaning negotiation.



CH A P. XI.

AFTER a consultation in what manner to conduct this delicate affair, without wounding either humanity or *bien-*
seance,

seance, it was settled that Lord Melville should continue a few days longer at Harding-Place, where a masquerade was fixed for the following Monday; and that Lord Claremont should go immediately to town, pay Miss Villiers a visit, and employ all his knowledge of the human heart, as well to discover her true character, as to lead her gently to the point of breaking off this idle connexion.

Lord Melville begged his father to soften the blow, as well by some act of generosity like that he had shown to Dorignon, as by every soothing art in the power of man to employ.

He intreated his lordship to be particularly careful to avoid wounding the feelings of her heart, if he found reason to think her affection for him real.

Lord Claremont smiled rather sarcastically at his son's apprehensions on this head,
and

and ordered his carriage to be at the door as soon as dinner should be ended.

He set off, pretending business of importance, got to town in the evening without being robbed, and in the morning sent the card we have already recited to Miss Villiers.



CHAPTER XII.

WE should have observed in the last Chapter, that Lord Melville, in the course of his narration, had mentioned, though very slightly, Sir Charles Watson's admiration of our heroine, from which a ray of light had darted on the mind of Lord Claremont, who was too proud of his success in respect to Dörignon, to think any design above the extent of his genius.

THE

The

The idea of disposing advantageously of two ladies who had composed a temporary part of his family, was the most flattering possible to Lord Claremont; and as he entertained not the least doubt that Lord Melville's connexion with Miss Villiers had been of the same intimate kind as that with Dorignon (though Lord Melville had assured him of the contrary), he resolved on seeing her Lady Watson, and in the mean time on supporting her in the situation, whatever that should be, in which his son, as he supposed, had already placed her.

As he had heard the story very imperfectly, and under the disadvantage of continual interruptions from the officious attention of Mr. Harding, these conjectures were very natural.

Under the full impression of these conjectures, he prepared for his visit, and regulated his plan accordingly.

THE

The idea of disposing advantageously of two ladies who had composed a temporary part of his family, was the most distressing possible to Lord Chremont; and as he continued to reflect on the loss of his wife, his mind was filled with this idea, and he

THE EXCURSION

him of the contrary, he resolved on seeing her Lady Weston, and in the mean time on supporting her in the mansion, whatever that should be, in which his son, as he supposed, had already placed her.

As he had heard the story very imperfectly, and under the disadvantage of confusion and interruption from the anxious attention of Mr. Harding, these conjectures were very natural.

Under the full impression of these conjectures, he prepared for his visit, and regulated his plan accordingly.

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B O O K VII.

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THE EXCURSION.

BOOK VII.

CHAP. I.

MISS Villiers expected Lord Claremont's visit with an impatience which will easily be imagined; but an impatience mixed with the most alarming apprehensions.

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G

He

He might not see her with the same eyes as his son; he might, on finding the disproportion of fortune so very great, think the attachment imprudent, and insist on a sacrifice, which, however painful to love, filial duty might render indispensable.



C H A P. II.

AT eight, on Sunday evening, February the twenty-sixth (the reader must have been very inattentive if he has not observed the precision of our chronology, a point on which we pique ourselves as much as Virgil on the geography of his immortal poem), Lord Claremont entered Miss Villiers's apartment, and by the easy politeness of his address, for he was one of the best-bred men in the world, dispelled in five mi-

nutes

nutes all the apprehensions to which she had given way before his appearance.

His lordship was not only one of the best-bred, but one of the handsomest men in town; and though considerably past fifty, might have passed for about thirty-eight.

He had beyond most men, the happy art of rendering himself agreeable to others, by putting them in good humour with themselves.

He practised this art with so much success in his first half hour's conversation with Miss Villiers, that she found herself inclined to have as implicit a confidence in him, as she could have had in Col. Dormer had he been present.

When, by a series of the most delicate and well-directed flattery, he had brought her mind to the very state he wished, he

proceeded to communicate, but by the gentlest gradations, the motives of his visit, and his ideas in respect to her future conduct.

“Will you, madam, pardon the liberty I take, when I tell you, you are the most lovely woman I ever beheld?”

“You have every thing to expect from such a profusion of charms, but you do not appear to know the use of them; and want a friend to conduct you through the devious path of life.

“In me behold that friend; command my utmost services, and open your whole heart to me without reserve.

“Depend on my cares to place you in the situation to which your beauty gives you the best possible right to pretend; but first tell me, with that amiable sincerity which is so visibly painted on your countenance,

"countenance, what is really the nature of
"your present connexion with Lord Mel-
"vile."

The vivid crimson on the cheek of Maria, who was equally charmed and embarrassed by a conversation which seemed to lead to all she wished; and the faltering of her voice when she attempted, but in vain, to make a reply, confirmed his lordship beyond the possibility of a doubt in his very probable conjecture in respect to their present intercourse.

He therefore proceeded on that supposition, and, willing to spare her confusion, continued his harangue without waiting for an answer.

After telling her he was sorry so tender an intercourse should be so soon interrupted, he informed her, that his son's intention had been to have made a settlement on her for life.

life, and to have continued her the mistress of his heart, though family considerations obliged him to give his hand to another.

He begged her to be assured of the sincerity of Lord Melville's attachment, and of the extreme difficulty he had found in convincing him of the imprudence of the step into which his passion for her had almost seduced him.

He added, that as Lord Melville's marriage with Miss Harding, which was to take place in a few days, would render the continuance of their connexion highly improper, it was become absolutely necessary to put an end to it, whatever regret such a sacrifice might cause Lord Melville.

That, thus circumstanced, and compelled by the arguments of an indulgent father, to relinquish the plan of life he had promised himself such happiness in pursuing, Lord
Melville

Melville had employed himself, as the person dearest to him, to convey to her his most passionate adieux, and to assure her that no time should ever obliterate the remembrance of her past condescension.

He stopped a moment, but observing she seemed unable to reply, and imagining the assiduity of a new lover the most effectual consolation for the neglect of an old one, he proceeded to inform her of the conquest she had made of Sir Charles Watson.

He assured her, as his opinion, that this young man, who knew much less of the world than Lord Melville, might even be brought in time, if she played her cards well, to change the rosy fetters of illicit Love, for the more durable and more respectable ones of Hymen.

"I will to-morrow," said His lordship,
 "give a supper, of which you shall be the
 G 4 "heroine,

"heroine, and invite Sir Charles to be of
"the party."

"In the mean time," added he, taking
out a pocket-book, and offering her a bank-
note, "Lord Melville entreats you, madam,
"as a grateful acknowledgement of that
"amiable partiality he must for the future
unwillingly decline, to accept this note
"for five hundred pounds, with which I
"have the honour to present you in his
"name."

CHAP. III.

FROM the commencement of Lord
Claremont's harangue to the moment
of its very unexpected conclusion, Miss Vil-
liers had kept the profoundest silence.

Deceived

Deceived by its beginning, pleasure had embarrassed her the first ten minutes; astonishment had next taken its turn, and had been succeeded by a degree of indignation which had almost suspended all her mental faculties.

Her excess of resentment and surprize, from the instant when Lord Claremont mentioned his son's intended marriage, had rendered her incapable of expressing what she felt at a discourse so very humiliating.

Petrified by the disappointment of all her dearest hopes, this offer, so alarming to her pride, and so totally destructive of every idea that Lord Melville loved her with honour, first aroused her to a perfect sense of her situation.

Though wounded to the soul, and torn by contending passions, she had the fortitude

to command all the tumultuous feelings of her breast.

Her mind, supported by its own native consciousness of worth, rose in proportion to the insult received.

She had acquired one very important advantage from this extraordinary conversation, and she felt it the moment her powers of reasoning returned, the advantage of being clearly informed as to the nature of Lord Melville's designs.

She could now be no longer the presumptuous dupe of her own easy credulity, or of Lord Melville's equivocal addresses.

Lord Claremont's degrading offer, like the sudden rush of the tempestuous North wind, had dissipated the too flattering fabric of hope, the air-built fabric raised by delusive imagination.

Adieu !

Adieu! the pleasing vision of expectation! Adieu! fortune! distinction! title!

Adieu! what she valued infinitely more, the tender union of consenting hearts, of those hearts she had fondly fancied made for each other!

She had the mortification to find, this *most amiable of men*, this *all-accomplished Lord Melvile*; this Lord Melvile, whose soul was *an emanation of the divinity*, a perfect resemblance of the *first good, first perfect*, and *first fair*, had never regarded her in any more honourable light than that of a kept-mistress.

C H A P. IV.

TO Lord Claremont's offer of the bank-note Miss Villiers had made no other answer than a repulsive, and not less graceful, wave of her hand, and a smile of ineffable disdain; but that smile expressed more strongly than language could have done the laudable resentment which filled her whole soul.

Prepossessed as Lord Claremont was with the idea of her dishonourable connexion with his son, he was yet awed by the air of dignity which she assumed.

He hesitated, and was at a loss in what manner to proceed, when, having recollected herself, she addressed him in the following terms :

"I am too sincere, my lord, to dissemble;
nor would dissimulation avail with a man
" of

" of your lordship's discernment and know-
 ledge of the world.

" Your lordship has awakened me from
 a pleasing dream to a lively sense of my
 own childish infatuation.

" Both Lord Melville and myself have
 been mistaken: I, in imagining him a
 man of honour; he, in supposing me a
 woman devoted to infamy.

" I am above disguise, my lord; I will
 not deny that I have loved Lord Melville;
 or rather, that I have loved the beautiful
 idol of my own creation, the ideal, the
 all-perfect Lord Melville, who no longer
 exists but in the traces of my deluded
 imagination.

" I am punished; my self-love perhaps
 merited this punishment, therefore I sub-

mit

"mit to it without complaining, and am
"thankful I am undeceived so soon.

"I would say something in my own vindication. I am incoherent, my lord, but
"it is perhaps impossible to be otherwise at
"this moment.

"I do not condemn Lord Melville; every
"man has his own characteristic way of
"thinking.

"I am unknown to you, my lord, which
"is your only excuse for what I have just
"heard; but from this moment learn to
"respect a woman whose family is not inferior to your own, whose virtues do not
"disgrace her birth, and whose error in
"this instance has been owing only to her
"youth, her inexperience of the depravity
"of mankind, her frank her open unsuspecting temper, her too great esteem of
"Lord Melville; and, in some degree, perhaps,

“haps, to a vanity which is pardonable at
“her season of life.

“Perhaps I am, however, still more cul-
“pable, perhaps Lord Melville’s rank was
“one of his attractions; perhaps my heart,
“filled as it was with tenderness for an ob-
“ject which appeared to me most amiable,
“yet adverted in some degree to those ex-
“ternal advantages which ought to have
“been below my attention, and that I
“looked forward with too much pleasure
“to a situation to which my fortune gave
“me less right to aspire in this age of un-
“exampled venality, than those who are in
“every other respect infinitely below me.

“I know not the lady whom your lord-
“ship has mentioned as the intended bride
“of Lord Melville; but perhaps fortune is
“the only advantage she has over the de-
“scendant, and that not very remote, of
“one of the noblest houses in the king-
“dom.

“Do

“Do not mistake these tears, my lord;
 “they are not those of weakness, but of
 “generous indignation.

“Your lordship must necessarily observe
 “the present agitation of my mind, and the
 “painful effort I make to behave as be-
 “comes me; and therefore have, I am con-
 “vinced, too much politeness to prolong a
 “visit which cannot but be extremely em-
 “barrassing to us both.”

Lord Claremont regarded her with a
 mixture of surprize and admiration.

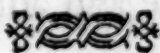
Ill as he thought of human-kind, he
 almost believed her a woman of honour.

At all events, however, he could not
 deny her the praise of being at least a
 woman of spirit.

He

He could not determine whether she played a part or not; but if she did, he allowed her the merit of playing it admirably.

He felt, as strongly as Miss Villiers, the propriety of shortening the visit; and, after attempting an apology, which he had better have let alone, as it only served to encrease their mutual embarrassment, he retired, and left our unfortunate heroine to her reflections.



C H A P. V.

TO her reflections? Alas! what reflections?

She threw herself, exhausted, and almost breathless, into a chair; the tears trickled down

down her face, which she covered with both her hands, as if ashamed of her weakness, though without spectators.

Not the injured royal Constance felt more strongly the Dauphin's perfidious alliance—

“Gone to be married? gone to swear a truce?”

Impossible! Lord Claremont had deceived her, in order to break off the attachment.

These arts were common amongst avaricious fathers.

She had read of them in an hundred novels, and at least half a dozen true histories.

How should she know whether her conjecture was founded in truth?

She

She owed it to Lord Melvile, as well as herself, to come to an eclarcissement.

Suppose she should write to him!

Write to a man who had treated her with such indignity?

But how was she certain it was Lord Melvile from whom she had received this indignity?

If her suspicions were true, he was not only innocent, but equally injured with herself.

They must be true; Lord Melvile's soul was the genuine feat of honour.

She sat down—she began—she burnt the letter—she wrote a second—she threw away the

the pen—all her resentment revived at the remembrance of Lord Claremont's last insult.

After a moment's reflection she determined, at all events, to write; justice to Lord Melville made this step an absolute duty.

The most abandoned criminal had a right to be heard.

She, however, thought it prudent to defer the execution of this design till her mind should be a little less agitated.

The succession of her ideas was astonishingly rapid.

She considered the whole transaction in every point of view; and every moment felt more strongly the impossibility of Lord Melville's

vile's being a party in the indelicate behaviour of his father.

From thinking it *possible* Lord Melville might still be the amiable being she had ever believed him, she proceeded to suppose it *probable*; from thence the transition to its being *certain* was amazingly easy.

Behold the naturally progressive action of a sanguine temper!

Her mind became, by degrees, more calm.

A ray of hope darted across the *palpable obscure* of the preceding half hour.

Lord Melville's idea once more presented itself in all its charms: she saw the smile of truth and candour on his lips.

W

We will leave her to renew her acquaintance with the gay phantom which had already misled her, and do ourselves the honour to pay a visit to Lady Blast.



CHAPTER VI.

THIS most dove-like of all possible dowagers had taken Harry into her service the moment he quitted that of Miss Villiers.

Amongst her other perfections, Lady Blast was a pretty good scribbler, and had more than once enriched the — Magazine with little anecdotes of her most intimate female friends; anecdotes which wanted no recommendation except the very useless one of being true.

She

She had interrogated Harry with the precision of an inquisitor; and had discovered enough to form an admirable *tete à tete* history of Lord M-lv-le and Miss V-ll--rs.

Harry had accidentally mentioned Mrs. Merrick's affectionate attachment to our heroine, and that she had sometimes called her by the tender appellation of *the dear child*.

The dear child, must undoubtedly have been Harry's mistake; she must, to a certainty, have said, *my dear child*.

Yes, *the* must have been an interpolation of Harry's: nothing was so easy as such a mistake.

The genuine original text must, undoubtedly, have been *my*.

The

The meaning of this very endearing expression was obvious; Mrs. Merrick was, to an absolute certainty, her mother.

This discovery was happy; the brilliant invention of Lady Blast supplied the rest.



C H A P. VII.

HER ladyship's manuscript, replete with gall, in its journey from her library to the press, had fallen into the hands of the compositor to a scandalous magazine, who, besides his being a man of so much feeling as to detest his present employment (an employment by which, however, he supported a wife and seven children), was a particular friend of Mrs. Merrick's brother, had often visited Mrs. Merrick, and had

had more than once seen our heroine as she passed the door of Mrs. Merrick's sitting parlour to her carriage.

The names of Mrs. Merrick and Miss Villers had struck him on his beginning to set the press.

As he proceeded, he found the scene of this infamous romance to be Berners-street.

The similarity of names and places was too great to be accidental.

His heart now became interested; he left his work unfinished, put the manuscript into his pocket, and hastened to find his friend.

A moment's digression if you please, gentle reader, on the present fashionable manufacture of printed calumny.

C H A P. VIII.

AMONGST the evils of the present hour, there is not one which more loudly demands redress, or which is more difficult to be redrest, than the licentious malignity of that press, the liberty of which is at once the glory and the strength of our constitution.

Beauty, youth, genius, all which can distinguish one human being from another, are the destined mark, the helpless prey, of the literary slanderer.

He counteracts the bounty of the benignant Creator, and turns the choicest blessings of heaven into curses.

His venal pen, tempted by a gain more shameful than that which pays the midnight robber, sacrifices the peace of families,
the

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the honour, the tranquillity, nay sometimes the lives, of the most virtuous individuals, on the merciless altar of Envy.

Yes, indignant reader, you feel the atrocity of his crime: you justly execrate the man who scatters arrows and death, and says, "Is it not in sport?"

The murderer of reputation merits the severest punishment which human laws, framed for human happiness, can inflict.

He merits to be driven from society, the sweets of which he tinges with the deadliest poison; to be driven from human converse to herd with congenial monsters, with the merciless inhabitants of the howling wilderness.

The just object of universal abhorrence, what punishment does not his crime deserve!

The pangs of poverty, dishonour, exile—death, if you please—I will not plead his cause; death is perhaps too mild an expiation of his offence.

But let us pause a moment—You—What do not you deserve?—You, who read his unhallowed works with approbation?

You, who tempt his distress to forge the savage tale?

You, who unsolicited by hard necessity, his dreadful plea, cruelly wound the fame of your unsuspecting neighbour, to gratify a malignant temper, or the idle curiosity of a moment?

Do you not—unfeeling as you are—by encouraging such detestable publications, wantonly plant yourself the envenomed dagger in the bosom of innocence?

It

It is in your power alone to restrain the growing evil, to turn the envenomed dart from the worthy breast.

Cease to read, and the evil dies of itself: cease to purchase, and the venal calumniator will drop his useless pen.

Think, whilst the cruel smile yet mantles on your cheek, that your own heart may be the next that is wrung by the malignant tale.

The amiable friend of your choice—the sister endeared to you by the tender ties of blood—the blooming daughter you educated with such anxious care—

Yourself—may be the next devoted victim.

Reflect one moment, and you will execrate the barbarous pleasure you have felt on reading these slanderous chronicles of falsehood.

You wish to be amused; I pardon, I commend your wish; but you may be amused without wounding the better feelings of your soul.

Believe me, the human mind is curious, not malignant.

It delights in well-painted pictures of life and manners, but does not demand that they shall be all drawn in shade.

The lovely form of virtue; of virtue, crowned by prosperity, or nobly struggling with the tide of adverse fortune, will amuse, will interest, will charm, beyond the black-
est

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est tints, wrought by the baleful hand of the literary assassin.

But to our story, which has been perhaps too long interrupted.



C H A P. IX.

OUR compositor had a wife and seven children, dependent on his labours for bread.

His heart had always revolted against his present employment, but there were reasons for continuing in it which had hitherto stifled its generous murmurs.

We have said, he had a wife and seven children dependent on him for bread.

He could not, perhaps, hope to be so well paid for attending a press more worthily employed.

If he declined this illiberal engagement, another, less scrupulous, would certainly accept it.

He had not till this moment seen in full light the pernicious tendency of this species of publication.

The injury might, for aught he knew, be, with the personages, merely ideal.

Lord H— and Lady M— were beings in the moon, nor did he know that such characters actually existed; they were as much out of the circle of his knowledge as if inhabitants of Japan.

This

This was the first instance of his knowing that any of the parties traduced had real existence.

From this moment he resolved to quit his present employment.

His children should not, he determined, eat the bread which was moistened by the tears of calumniated virtue.

He gave notice to the person who employed him, and whom he met accidentally on the stairs, to provide himself with another compositor.

His heart grew lighter as he spoke.

The pleasurable swell of self-approbation expanded his honest bosom,

The benevolent Father of all must certainly (thus he reasoned) see with more than indulgence a resolution founded on the best feelings of the human heart.

To Providence therefore directing his industry, he resolved to trust for his future support.

To Providence we will leave him for a moment, and return to Berners-street.



C H A P. X.

WE left our heroine struggling, against conviction, to believe Lord Melvile faithful to engagements which he had never entertained the remotest idea of forming.

Engage-

Engagements, which, to do his lordship justice, had their existence only in her credulity, her pardonable vanity, her sanguine temper, and absolute ignorance of the world.

He had intended to *seduce*, but had no design to *deceive* her.

On the contrary, he had offered her *a settlement* in terms, which, being sufficiently intelligible to himself, he concluded were so to her.

She was, however, determined to believe, and therefore did believe, his marriage a fiction invented by an interested father, and for interested ends.

This was not a very improbable conjecture; but it has been well observed by

somebody, that probability is not always on the side of truth.

She rose on Monday, after a sleepless night, half resolved to write Lord Melville a narrative of his father's visit and conversation, and to demand an eclaircissement on a point in which both his happiness and honour were so deeply interested.

That quick sensibility to the *beautiful*, the *becoming*, in the intercourse of life; that spontaneous feeling of

“A grace, a manner, a decorum,”

in morals; to which women owe half their virtue, alone prevented her taking so humiliating a step.

C H A P XI.

THERE was another subject on which it was necessary for her to think; another care which obtruded itself even through all her anxiety in respect to Lord Melville; nay, which that very anxiety contributed greatly to heighten.

She had entered into a style of life not to be supported at a trifling expence.

She had not five pounds in the world, nor did she know where to get a supply.

She had tried her *friend* Lady Hardy, and we have seen the mortifying result of the experiment.

She had but one friend to whom it became her to apply, Col. Dormer, her respectable

spectable uncle; and how should she assume courage to tell him of her extravagance?

How acquaint him, that, a dupe to hope, misled by the glittering of a meteor, she had expended the revenue of years in little more than a month's absence from Belfont?

Her literary hopes were at an end.

Alas! was not her every hope as ill founded?

Lord Claremont's story, it was at least *possible*, might be true.

She shuddered at taking a view of her situation.

She could not expect another hundred pounds to drop from the clouds: John had, by her orders, paid it all away, though it was Sunday when she received it.

By

By the way, to whom could she have been thus obliged?

The doubt must have struck my reader, as well as the lovely Maria.



C H A P. XII.

AS we are not writing a fairy tale, but the true history of a young lady in Old England; a country where these little benevolent beings have long left off their delightful midnight gambols, and do not even condescend to drop a sixpence in the shoe of Marian; it may be necessary to account for this very well-timed, though anonymous, act of friendship.

C H A P.

C H A P. XIII.

LADY Hardy and Lady Blast, whom we left whispering in a corner, at Mrs. Harwood's assembly, were tittering over our heroine's letter to the former, requesting her to lend her an hundred pounds till she could receive a remittance from the country; when Mr. Hammond, whose visit to Mrs. Harwood that evening was merely accidental, happened to approach the benevolent pair.

As he was nearly related to Lady Blast, he took the liberty of asking the cause of their exuberant mirth, when Lady Hardy very politely gave him the letter to read.

Both the name and the writing were too familiar to him to be mistaken.

He

He very composedly put the letter in his pocket, and left the room without speaking a syllable.

The ladies called after him, but to no manner of purpose.

He crossed the street to Mrs. Merrick, and received from her a very circumstantial and very satisfactory account of the birth, fortune, connexions, virtues, hopes, and romantic expectations, of Miss Villiers; expectations of which he knew the fallacy, being perfectly acquainted with Lord Claremont's negotiation with Mr. Harding.

After enjoining Mrs. Merrick secrecy on the subject of this conversation, he retired to his lodgings, took a bank note of an hundred pounds out of his bureau, sealed it up in a blank cover; and, in the morning, sent it to Miss Villiers by a servant on whom he could

could depend, in the manner we have already recited.

But his philanthropy did not stop here.

He saw her on the borders of a precipice, and determined to withdraw her from it, in spite of herself.

He saw the utmost delicacy must be preserved in the attempt.

He was a poet, therefore his ideas were rapid.

He formed his plan in a moment, and ordered his chaise to the door, to put it in execution.

THE

THE EXCURSION.

B O O K VIII.

THE EXCURSION

BOOK VIII.

THE EXCURSION.

B' O O K VIII.

C H A P. I.

IF Mr. Hammond's wheels had been as rapid as his ideas, he would have reached Belfont (for thither he bent his course) with the velocity of a spirit.

He arrived at this abode of tranquillity about twelve on Monday morning, and found Col. Dormer hanging with undissembled rapture over an expanding rose-bud in his Lilliputian green-house.

Mr. Hammond could not have met with a more favourable occasion of being eloquent, and even poetical, than the present.

He knew all of which Lady Blast was capable.

He had, by accident from a female friend, heard all the slanderous effusions of the pair of dowagers, in respect to our amiable heroine.

His fears for her reputation were much stronger than those he felt in respect to her fortune, though he thought both in the most imminent danger.

He

He might have simlized in the garden for an hour, without going a step out of his way.

He might have observed to Col. Dormer, that, whilst his green-house engaged his attention, a fairer rose than any which bloomed there, was menaced with a blight from the empoisoned breath of Envy.

He might have said—

In short, he might have said a thousand pretty things, if saying pretty things had been the purpose of his journey.

This, however, not being the case, and being determined not to enter abruptly on the subject nearest his heart, the dangerous situation of Miss Villiers, he for once went out of his character, and made use of an innocent artifice to avoid alarming Col. Dormer too soon.

After having apologized politely for what appeared an intrusion, he reminded Col. Dormer, who had totally forgot him, of their having been fellow students and friends at Oxford; and, without entering on his real motive for this visit, told him he could not pass the door of an old acquaintance, without stopping to enquire after his health.

He added, that he had an additional motive for calling, which was, to tell him he had seen his amiable niece, Miss Villiers, a few days before, in town, and had left her in good health and spirits.

There are no people so happy in meeting unexpectedly with their friends, and especially the friends of their youth, as those who, in advanced age, pass their time retired in the country.

In this situation, the arrival, even of a common visitant, is of consequence, as it relieves

lieves the too regular uniformity of occupation, which is the only drawback on the tranquil delights of retirement.

The arrival of a *friend*, in such a situation, is an event, a little æra, worthy of special note in the chronological table of secluded life.

Col. Dormer's garden was to him a source of inconceivable pleasure—But—always the garden!

Besides—more than half the real value of every enjoyment depends on the social idea of its being communicated.

There is no such thing as solitary happiness.

The vernal family of Col. Dormer acquired new charms in his eyes in proportion as they became the admiration of others.

Mr. Hammond was a new admirer, whose praises enhanced the beauties of every flowret which engaged his attention.

He was also a new companion to fill up the void in the society of Belfont, occasioned by the absence of Maria.

Louisa's conversation would have been sufficient to Col. Dormer's happiness, had he not been also habituated to that of her sister.

We feel severely the privation of every pleasure to which we have been long accustomed.

The lovely prattler!—

The creative eye of fancy presented her tripping, with Louisa, delighted by his side.

That

That lovely prattler!

With what impatience did he not expect her return to Belfont!



C H A P. II.
AFTER a tour round the garden, a particular visit to every favourite daughter of the spring, and a little retrospective chat on the subject of old college adventures; Col. Dormer, having first obtained Mr. Hammond's promise of spending a few days at Belfont, presented him to the bright Louisa, who appeared to him only less charming than her sister.

For that sister the good old man felt an enthusiastic partiality, which, had he been

younger, would have amounted to a passion.

He regarded Louisa with admiration; she was, he acknowledged, lovely—But Maria—

Louisa had the finest blue eyes in the world, but he hated blue eyes.

Maria's were eyes indeed—eyes informed by the radiant blaze of genius—

The vivid glow of her complexion—the animated changes of her countenance as her ideas varied—the enchantment of her smile—

In short, he was ready to exclaim, in the words of the Spectator,

“Louisa is beautiful, but Maria, thou art
“beauty!”

They

They passed a chearful evening, and retired early to bed, in favour of Mr. Hammond's fatigue.

He slept little during the first part of the night; he revolved in his mind the circumstance which occasioned his journey.

He found a thousand difficulties in respect to the manner in which he should enter on the subject of Miss Villiers's situation.

He might have said, with more propriety, her *indiscretion*, but he would not even allow that she was indiscreet.

He called her profusion the ebullition of a noble mind; and found merit even in that heedless inattention to forms which threatened such dreadful consequences.

He at last determined, as he intended staying two or three days, to trust to the chapter of accidents, and only be on the watch to find a favourable moment.

He could not, even in this short intercourse, have missed Col. Dormer's prevailing passion; and rightly judged that a mild vernal shower, or the blowing of a new auricula, might have the best effect possible on the mind of his friend.

The morning being uncommonly fine, the carriages were ordered to the door at eleven.

Col. Dormer proposed to give Mr. Hammond the pleasure of seeing Burghley, the celebrated seat of the still more celebrated Statesman whose name it bears, from whence Belfont was distant only a few miles.

To Burghley therefore they proceeded.

As

As a lover of the imitative arts, Mr. Hammond was charmed with seeing the noble works of the divine masters with which this magnificent seat is ornamented and enriched.

But he felt (as a patriot worthy of the name) a much sublimer pleasure in calling to remembrance the public virtues of the great, the wise, the uncorrupt, minister, who raised the glory of his country to its utmost summit.

He regarded his portrait with reverential delight.

He fancied he saw his venerable shade in every apartment through which he was conducted.

Our party returned to Belfont, but not alone.

I 4

They

They met in the avenue, within a few paces of the house, Mr. Montague, the rural philosopher of whom we have spoken before, as lord of the manor of Belfont.

He was coming on a visit to the benevolent master of this superb mansion, who was however, at this time, absent in London.

His son, the object that had reconciled Louisa to shades and solitude, and whom our little family supposed to be attending his studies at Cambridge, was with him.

They were both on horseback, and both stopped on seeing Col. Dormer's carriage.

Mr. Montague the younger had been ill of a fever at college, and had been sent home (where he arrived the evening before) for change of air, by his physicians.

His

His illness had left a paleness which only rendered his countenance, if possible, more interesting than ever.

Mr. Hammond was struck with a face so full of expression, and was going to ask his name, when he approached the chaise in which the good old man was with the lovely Louisa.

On seeing the object of her tenderest affection in a manner thus un hoped and unexpected, the cheek of Louisa became suffused with the liveliest crimson; her heart beat thick, her voice faltered, and her repeated attempts to speak terminated in broken and inarticulate accents.

By a movement, not only involuntary, but unknown at the time to herself, she, with a trembling hand, let down the glass of the carriage at Mr. Montague's approach.

He addressed her with an emotion which, though perhaps favourable to his beauty, was far from being so to his elocution.

The confusion, the agitation, the pleasure visible in the countenances of both, were too perceptible to escape Mr. Hammond's observation.

Their looks were sufficiently intelligible to stand in no need of an historian to inform him of the situation of their hearts.

He now thought Louisa as handsome as her sister.

She had lost that air of still-life which had at first sight extremely displeased him.

Her blue eyes were become lovely by being impassioned.

In short she appeared to him another being; so much does beauty depend on animation.

She was no longer a faultless statue, but an enchanting woman; an object, not merely of admiration, but of passion.

Mr. Montague left his son by the side of Miss Villiers's chaise, and, giving his horse to a servant, returned to Belfont in that of Col. Dormer.

The party separated at Mr. Montague's door, who invited himself, and his family, consisting of this son, and a very amiable daughter, to spend the afternoon at Col. Dormer's.

C H A P. III.

WHEN we last set out for London, we left Mr. Montague the younger at Col. Dormer's gate, where he arrived in the intention of explaining himself in the clearest terms to Louisa on the subject of his passion.

This resolution we have observed had been a little precipitated by the report that a man of great fortune had made proposals to Col. Dormer for his niece; which report, however, happened not to be true.

As minute details of conversation between lovers are much more interesting to the parties concerned than to anybody else, we shall waive particulars, and only say, that Mr. Montague was not dissatisfied with the interview; and that during the three weeks of

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of his stay at Belfont, for he went to college a week sooner than he intended, he had brought her to promise never to marry any other man, though she persisted in refusing to enter into any positive engagement with him, unless with his father's most perfect approbation.

He went to Cambridge satisfied in some degree with this promise, and determined to write the state of his heart to his father.

He was, however, prevented by a fit of illness, brought on by his fears that Mr. Montague, indulgent as he was, would not approve an alliance in which interest had so little share.

He had forgot that this excellent father was a philosopher in the most extensive sense of the word; and that, setting his philosophy aside, his very prejudices would in this instance be in his favour.

In

In short, he was not, though he ought to have been, exempt from the baneful error of young people, in supposing it possible they can have any friend half as much interested in their happiness as a parent.

He wrote, however, to his sister, who had always been the confidante of his passion, and told her his determination to ask his father's permission to marry Miss Villiers, as soon as he should return to Belfont.

On hearing of his illness, alarmed for his life, Miss Montague disclosed the secret to her father, who had ordered his carriage to be ready in the morning, in the intention of going himself to fetch him from Cambridge, when he arrived in a post-chaise at the door.

Mr. Montague, who thought happiness the first object of every rational being, and
 01 knew

knew it did not depend on wealth, was perfectly satisfied with the choice his son had made; but as marriage is a step there is no retrieving, he was anxious to be clearly informed as to the inclinations of the young lady, before he took any measure preparatory to a union, to which, supposing their attachment mutual, he had not the shadow of an objection.

The ride of this morning had, accidentally, saved him much trouble on this subject.

He had observed the countenance of Miss Villiers, on his son's approach, with the most scrutinizing eye, and had not a doubt remaining.

In the full conviction that the future felicity of both depended on their union, he had taken his place in Col. Dormer's chaise, and had asked his consent to present his son

to

to

to Miss Villiers in the afternoon, as a candidate for the honour of her hand.

There was but one point in which these two excellent men had disagreed.

Col. Dormer was for deferring the marriage two or three years longer, and Mr. Montague for concluding it immediately.

When the former had exhausted all his arguments, which Mr. Montague heard with more patience than he was accustomed to show when contradicted, he made the following reply :

“ I cannot, my good friend, account for
 “ your arguing so unphilosophically, on any
 “ principle except that of your supposing a
 “ little assumed reluctance becomes you, as
 “ standing in the place of the young lady.

“ But

“ But let me entreat you to lay aside your
“ coyness for a moment, and talk like a rea-
“ sonable being.

“ My son’s happiness depends on his
“ being united with Miss Villiers; and let
“ me, with the pardonable pride of a pa-
“ rent, add, that the qualities of his heart
“ promise that the happiness consequent on
“ this union will be reciprocal.

“ You and I, by keeping in the formal
“ beaten track, may postpone the æra of
“ their felicity a few years longer.

“ But reflect a moment, and answer me
“ one plain question; do you think it possi-
“ ble to be happy too soon?

“ The poet justly complains, that

“ Man never *is*, but always *to be*, blest.”

“ I am

" I am afraid this is too generally our
" own fault.

" We are preparing for happiness when
" we might be enjoying it.

" Human life is too short, and too uncer-
" tain, to have its best hours wasted in ex-
" pectation.

" You talk of his staying at college till
" he has taken a degree.

" I have not the least objection to his
" keeping the necessary residence till that
" time, which is not very distant : but I see
" no reason to delay his marriage on that
" account, as he is not a candidate for a
" fellowship.

" As to foreign travel, I am in this re-
" spect a little singular ; but I am not
" ashamed

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"ashamed of being singularly in the
"right.

"I do not wish him to wear out his heart,
"poison his principles, and ruin his consti-
"tution, by despicable connexions with
"French opera girls, or Italian courtezans.

"Still less do I wish him to run the effe-
"minate circle of *frivolité* and *ton* at Paris;
"or to pore over rusty coins, and study
"virtù at Rome.

"A young antiquarian is every way a
"solecism.

"If a young man must have pursuits, as
"he certainly must, let them be the pur-
"suits of his season of life.

"I can forgive even an irregular passion
"for animated beauty; but the man who at
"twenty-two,

"Sighs

“Sighs for an Otho, and neglects his bride,”
 “should be disinherited if a son of mine.

“But to our business; I am the happiest
 “man on earth in the choice my son has
 “made; and in being convinced Miss Vil-
 “liers honours him with her esteem.

“The favour of such a woman might
 “make an emperor proud.

“I have long hoped their childish affec-
 “tion for each other would ripen into
 “love; and had I never observed their mu-
 “tual tenderness before, their meeting just
 “now would have flashed conviction on my
 “mind.

“Determined to guard my son against
 “the misery of selling himself to keep the
 “family estate together, I have always had
 “this moment in view.

“My

“ My estate is three thousand pounds a
“ year, of which I have laid by half ever
“ since I was married ; that I might become
“ rich enough to make my children happy
“ without retrenching my own expences.

“ I have purchased Charles a thousand
“ pounds a year, with a pretty house, about
“ six miles off ; and have ten thousand
“ pounds to give my daughter whenever
“ she chuses to marry ; and all this without
“ lessening my paternal fortune a shilling ?”

As Mr. Montague pronounced the last sentence, the chaise stopped at his door.

Col. Dormer set him down, and entered his own house with an air of satisfaction which did not escape Louisa.

He was gay beyond his usual custom ; his eye spoke the most perfect content whenever it met that of his amiable niece.

C H A P. IV.

MR. Hammond, who observed this without absolutely knowing the cause, could not find in his heart to damp the joy of his friend by speaking to him on so painful a subject as that of Maria's indiscretion.

A day or two had elapsed in visits to and from the Montagues.

The most important articles of the marriage treaty were settled; Mr. Hammond had arranged, in idea, his intended conversation with Col. Dormer, and was waiting the latter's return from the manor-house, where he was in consultation with Mr. Montague, when he received, by the post, from Mrs. Merrick, the malevolent history of Maria, which had been brought to her by the honest
compositor

compositor of whom we have spoken in the last book.

Our heroine, in this infamous picture, was drawn in the darkest colours that falsehood and envy in conjunction could furnish.

She was described, and with some appearance of plausibility, as an adventurer, and of the most abandoned kind.

As the illegitimate daughter of Mrs. Merrick, by a certain foreign dancer, whom we are authorized to say Mrs. Merriek never beheld.

As having received from this ideal father an education which distinguished her from her equals, and a degree of art and address which enabled her to undertake, and to support, the difficult rôle of a woman of birth and condition.

As

As having been educated by her supposed parents expressly for the purposes of prostitution.

As having been sold at seventeen to Mr. Hammond, who had taken an apartment at Mrs. Merrick's for that very purpose; and as having been supported by him in an expensive style of life, in order to draw in some young man of fashion to marry her.

As having failed in her plan in respect to Lord Melvile, and as having condescended to live with this nobleman on other terms, when she found her hope of seducing him into a matrimonial engagement abortive.

As having been left by him on the approach of his intended marriage, and being now on sale to the highest bidder.

The

The reader will judge of Mr. Hammond's feelings on reading this diabolical scroll, but no words can paint his astonishment at finding himself one of the heroes of the tale.

If he had wanted a proof of its falsehood, could one have been produced equally decisive with this?

He was now doubly obliged to stand forth her champion.

How should he act on so extraordinary an occasion?

Should he communicate this vile fable to Col. Dormer?

He knew his warmth of temper and quick sense of honour, and therefore dreaded the consequences of trusting him with a secret

of this kind, in which he was so nearly interested.

He knew the world, and the delicate nature of female honour.

The press must be stopped at all events.

He trembled at the idea of what might happen in his absence.

He regarded the manuscript with more attention.

The hand-writing was disguised, but he instantly knew it to be that of Lady Blast.

Afraid of trusting so dark a transaction to an amanuensis, this good lady (who had made the penny-post her vehicle of conveyance) had transcribed this benevolent offspring of her brain for the press herself.

This circumstance was extremely fortunate for our heroine.

Her ladyship hated, but she also feared, Mr. Hammond.

It was not probable she had sent the printer a second copy of her libel, as such a step might have led to a discovery of the author.

The first was happily in Mr. Hammond's own possession.

The most important point was to see Lady Blast as soon as possible.

In such a situation not an instant was to be lost.

It was not necessary to embarrass Col. Dormer with this disagreeable affair.

His mind was more pleasingly occupied by the approaching marriage of Louisa.

It would be inhuman to disturb the felicity of his friend.

Allons, donc ! The carriage was immediately ordered.

Col. Dormer returned from his early visit, and was astonished to find Mr. Hammond's chaise at his gate.

The good old man apologized for this unexpected flight.

Some business, which he had only that moment recollected, rendered it impossible for him to continue an instant longer one of the happy group at Belfont.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

MR. Hammond's wheels never stopped till he reached the door of Lady Blaft.

He defied, and he escaped, all the dangers of Enfield chace, and arrived about eleven at night at the house of this respectable dowager, which he found full of company.

He sent for her down to her dining-parlour, and, without the least preface, looking her earnestly in the face,

“Do you know this paper, Madam?”

If she could have turned paler, she would at the sight. She hesitated—“That paper, “cousin”—

"I disclaim all relationship, Madam, till
"you have atoned for this infamous ac-
"tion.

"I will not expose you to your visitants,
"but let me see you at my lodgings early
"to-morrow morning: I hope, for your
"sake, I am the only person who knows
"of this affair."

His looks, his authoritative tone, and her
own consciousness of guilt, appalled her.

She told him with hesitation, she would
see him in the morning, and returned trem-
bling to her company.

Mr. Hammond went from thence to Mrs.
Merrick's, where he learned from a servant,
Mrs. Merrick being out, that Miss Villiers
had been gone three days into the country.

"Into

“ Into the country ? She was not at Belfont.”

He was bewildered ; but as he was also extremely fatigued, he thought it best to go home, and give the night to repose.

His mind was still that of a knight-errant, but his body was not quite so able to keep pace with its flights as it had been at twenty-two.



C H A P. VI.

THE morning after Mr. Hammond had set out for Belfont, Miss Villiers, though she knew not half her danger, had risen in a state of mind which Lady Blaft herself would almost have pitied.

She saw the precipice on the borders of which she stood, though she saw it not in all its horrors.

She knew not Lady Blast's inventive genius, nor did she know herself the object of her malice.

She saw disappointment, she saw distress, before her; but she had not the remotest apprehension of infamy.

She knew not the blow now levelled at her fame.

She knew not that the stroke, if given, would probably be fatal; that the wounds of calumny are never perfectly healed.

The human mind, impelled by its own restless nature, fond of the marvellous, and ever seeking food for that curiosity which carries

carries us to so much good and so much evil, imbibes with eagerness the animated tale of slander, because animated.

To investigate its truth, to withdraw the veil which covers a well-invented falsehood, requires a cool dispassionate exertion of the understanding, a patience of enquiry, to which few, not personally interested, will submit.

It is an effort, and from all effort the mind of man naturally flies.

Infatuated girl! Why did she leave her household gods?

Those household gods are alone the certain guardians of female honour.

We have said, her quick sensibility of the *becoming*, had prevented her writing, on *Monday*, to Lord Melville.

That sensibility gave way, *on Tuesday*, to the august idea of justice.

Lord Melville had a *right* to be heard in his own defence.

After resolving, doubting, re-resolving, an hundred times, she sat down, and wrote him a letter full of confidence and sentiment.

“What inconsistency!” It is true, but the human heart is inconsistent.

She owned her tenderness; a tenderness justified, and even rendered meritorious, by his virtues; by virtues which it would be profaneness even to doubt.

She recounted, but with as much softening as the case would admit, the supposed artifices of Lord Claremont to break this

union.

union of two enamoured hearts; of two hearts so evidently *formed for each other*.

She proceeded, like a miss educated in shades, to promise him everlasting love.

Could she do less?—He was so superior to all his sex!—"To her the whole universe contained no other being."

In short, she ran on in the high romance style the length of two quarto pages, and then dispatched John to his lordship's house, with orders to deliver it to himself, if at home, and to wait his answer.

Her chariot, which she had determined *indeed* to keep only that *little week* (a week could not make much difference in the expence), drove up to the door about a quarter of an hour after John set off; and in five minutes was obliged to give way to another;

which Miss Villiers took for granted was that of Lord Melville.

Interested as she was in the question, she had not courage to satisfy herself by going to the window.

The rustling of silks on the stairs first informed her she was mistaken in her conjecture.

The door opened, and she saw—not Lord Melville, but Mrs. Herbert, whom she supposed to be still in France.

Mrs. Herbert! What unexpected happiness!

The friend of her heart at the moment when a friend was most necessary.

She was breathless with joy—

“My

“My dear Miss Villiers, need I say how
“ charmed I am to find you in town?”

“My dear madam—no words—”

“I was afraid you had company, as I
“ saw a chariot at your door.”

Maria blushed—

“By the way, my dear, you will pardon
“ the digression?—May I ask whose cha-
“ riot it is? It is by much the prettiest I
“ have seen in England.”

She hesitated—

“It is—it is mine, madam.”

“Yours, my dear? Do I understand
“ you? Are you then married?”

“Not

"Not yet—But I am so happy to see
 "you"—

At this moment John entered, and informed Miss Villiers, that having asked for Lord Melville, he was informed his lordship was gone into the country, to the seat of his intended father-in-law, Mr. Harding, and would not be in town till after his marriage.

His marriage!—Her misery was then certain—she sunk motionless into a chair.

As Miss Villiers had too little art to hide her feelings, and Mrs. Herbert too much knowledge of the world to mistake them, the latter was soon *au fait* as to the interest her friend took in all that related to Lord Melville.

She however spared her confusion, told her she looked pale, that she saw the town
 did.

did not agree 'with her, and insisted on taking her for three or four days to the villa of her mother-in-law, Lady Sophia Herbert, about twenty miles from town.

"I will send off one of my servants this moment to apprize Lady Sophia of our intended visit, and if you please, my dear, we will be with her at dinner to-morrow: this day I insist on your spending with me: we will be denied, and chat over all our Rutland adventures."

Our heroine was too unhappy at home, and too weary of her own society, not to be delighted with the proposal.

She endeavoured to hide the emotion she could not absolutely restrain; and Mrs. Herbert, who saw her distress, and wished to give her time to recover from the shock, pretended to have visits to pay, and left her till dinner to herself.

We

We have said Miss Villiers had a mind, which, though full of sensibility, was naturally carried to see every thing on the brightest side.

Mrs. Herbert's absence was, as she imagined it would be, a relief to her friend.

She sat down, she read the letter John had brought back; she dropped a tear of regret—she dropped a second.

She wept the loss of the *most charming of mankind*; she grieved such a letter, for it was admirably written, should be thrown away.

No ray of hope remained as to the first source of her grief; as to the second, she determined to insert this letter in her next novel.

“ Her

"Her next novel?" Is she not then cured of the disease of writing?

Alas! my friend, it is plain you have never been an author.

One rational motive of consolation however remained.

Her folly in writing that letter was only known to herself.

It had not reached the hand for which it was destined.

It had not swelled the triumph of the intended Lady Melville.

She also felt that certainty of evil is more supportable than doubt.

These reflections were interrupted by her friseur.

A fresh

A fresh subject of consolation now offered.

She approached the glass—

O Vanity! benevolent goddess! How much are human miseries alleviated by thy celestial influence!



C H A P. VII.

OUR fair heroine, drest with the utmost taste, and with an air of *ton* which surprized Mrs. Herbert, arrived a little after four at the house of that lady.

They dined; Miss Villiers wished to unbosom herself to her friend, but wanted courage.

Her

Her presence, however, restor'd some part of her tranquillity.

They talked of Belfont, of Col. Dormer, of her sister : her heart seemed lightened of half its load.

Mrs. Herbert made her smile by drawing ridiculous pictures of some of her country acquaintance.

They were drinking their coffee in Mrs. Herbert's dressing-room when a servant threw open the door.

"Blockhead ! Did I not give orders to be denied ?"

"It is Col. Herbert, madam."

"My brother ? You will excuse me, my dear Miss Villiers ; I am never denied to him."

Maria

Maria rose, and turning her head, saw enter the room the very man who had broken-in on her *tete à tete* with Lord Melville.

He was even in the same dress; it was impossible she could be mistaken.

She blushed—she looked down—

Mrs. Herbert introduced her brother; he addressed Maria without shewing any consciousness of having ever seen her before.

His eyes had, however, betrayed him.

Maria had remarked a glance of mixed enquiry and surprize, from which he recovered in a moment, but which convinced her he had not forgot the adventure.

She

She felt his delicacy, and was charmed with it; but it humbled her infinitely in her own eyes.

Was there a moment of her life for which she had occasion to blush?

In what a light must she have appeared to the brother of her friend!

What must he think of her when he felt it necessary to dissemble that he had seen her before!

She was superior to every evil but loss of honour.

Was hers suspected? And for whom? For a man who had left her for another—who had not even deigned to bid her farewell.

Would

Would to heaven she had never seen Lord Melville!

Her reverie was interrupted by Col. Herbert, who acquainted his sister he came ambassador from Lady Sophia to invite her to spend a few weeks with her in Surry.

“And I, my dear brother, have this morning sent William to acquaint Lady Sophia of my intention to pass some days with her, and to have the pleasure of introducing this young lady.”

“What say you, Miss Villiers? will you do the maddest thing in the world, despite the danger of travelling in the dark, and set out for Surry this moment?”

Col. Herbert looked at his sister: he had been surprized at finding with her a person
whose

whose character appeared to him something beyond equivocal.

He was much more so to find she intended to introduce her to his mother.

He must be mistaken : she could not be the person whom he had surprized at midnight *tete à tete* with Lord Melville.

It was necessary to clear his suspicions before the visit to Lady Sophia was undertaken ; yet he would have died rather than have hinted those suspicions to Mrs. Herbert.

He called her into another room on pretence of business, and after speaking in raptures of the beauty of her visiter, asked, but in a careless manner, as if a mere accidental question, who she was.

Mrs. Herbert, who observed the emotion which he endeavoured to hide, and who attributed

tributed it all to the charms of Miss Villiers, smiled at his affectation of unconcern, and assured him her friend was as amiable as she was lovely, and had but one fault in the world, which was, that her fortune was inadequate to her birth.

That she was a woman of perfect honour; but with all the fire, and she was sorry to say, all the indiscretion of the very opposite character.

That, as a proof of this, she had found her in town, on her return from France, in the most improper situation imaginable, alone, in a lodging, and passing her time in *a certain set*.

“ A *set*, my dear brother, which I need not tell you is the very worst of all possible society, especially for a young woman, whose reputation is equally endangered by their malice and their example.

“ A *set*,

“ A *set*, who are wholly engrossed by
“ play, intrigue, and scandal; and so par-
“ ticularly devoted to the first, that they see
“ the approach of the genial spring with
“ horror.

“ For them no vernal shower descends,
“ no roses bloom; they prefer December to
“ May, and execrate the smiling Zephyrs,
“ for blowing away their cards.

“ In order to restore the bright polish of
“ her fame, which must have been a little
“ injured by this indiscreet connexion, I
“ am going to introduce her to the shrine of
“ honour; that is, in plain terms, I intend
“ to put her for a few weeks under Lady
“ Sophia's protection.

“ My acquaintance with her began last
“ summer in Rutland, where I found her
“ in the bosom of domestic happiness, with
VOL. II. L “ her

“her uncle, one of the most respectable
“characters I know.

“A man of the finest understanding, and
“politest manners; and who, I believe,
“never did a foolish thing but when he suf-
“fered Miss Villiers to come to town un-
“protected.

“In short, it is amazing to me how a
“man of Col. Dormer’s turn of mind could
“suffer his niece—”

“Col. Dormer! Let me understand you,
“sister: did you say Miss Villiers was the
“niece of Col. Dormer?”

“I did.”

“Is it possible you can be in earnest?
“You have no idea, my dear sister, how
“happy you have made me.

“I began

"I began my military life a cadet of
"seven years old in Col. Dormer's regi-
"ment: he is the man on earth to whom
"I am most obliged."

Mrs. Herbert smiled—

They returned to Maria, who began to
be alarmed at their absence.

Col. Herbert, whose doubts were all dis-
pelled by the conversation which had just
passed, approached Miss Villiers, his eyes
sparkling with pleasure, and made a thou-
sand enquiries after the health of his
friend.

Mrs. Herbert's chariot, and her brother's
horses, came to the door; they set off,
though it was almost dark, and reached
Lady Sophia's little villa exactly at ten
o'clock.

C H A P. VIII.

IF Virtue—gentle, indulgent, feminine
 Virtue, had chosen to descend on earth
 in a human form, she would have assumed
 that of Lady Sophia Herbert.

With a figure still elegant, and a face
 which wanted only the bloom of youth to
 be beautiful, she had an air which spoke
 her birth to have been the most distin-
 guished: an air which would have been
 commanding, had not its impression been
 softened by the smile of undisssembled good-
 ness.

Her countenance spoke, in the most ex-
 pressive language, that calm sunshine of the
 soul which is the happy monopoly of virtue.

She was perfectly well-bred, without the
 remotest tincture of affectation.

She

She had mixed in the *world*; but her inclination, and the mediocrity of her fortune, had preserved her from mixing in the *ton*.

Left a widow extremely young, she had devoted her whole time to the care of educating Col. Herbert, her only child, and pointing out his road to glory, by showing him the paths marked out by his illustrious ancestors.

He had returned her cares by meriting them, and by a filial affection which bordered on enthusiasm.

Mr. Herbert's estate had been inherited by his eldest son, born of another mother, the husband of Miss Villiers's friend.

On his death, without children, what remained of the family fortune had descended to Col. Herbert.

He received it a good deal impaired by his brother's profuseness, and by Mrs. Herbert's jointure.

He had, however, remaining about seven hundred pounds a year, which he divided with his mother, whose situation was before by no means suitable to her birth, but which this addition made perfectly easy.

She had remonstrated, but to no purpose; he rightly observed, that he was a single man, and that whilst he continued so, a handsome lodging, and a hired chariot, were all the exteriors for which he had occasion, and that his pride was much more interested in her ladyship's appearance than his own.

CHAP.

C H A P. IX.

A Word or two, gentle reader, in respect to this young man; after which we will leave the party at Lady Sophia's to get acquainted, and see what is become of Mr. Hammond.

Col. Herbert had entered into the army, as we have observed, a perfect child, where he had acquired all the frankness and generosity of the military character; to which, by the cares of his mother, he had added a competent share of learning, and a particular taste for polite literature.

He had travelled, not in the modern style, under his own guidance, at nineteen, with some needy dependent French adventurer as an apology for a tutor, but with a nobleman, his near relation, who had been

ambassador at one of the first courts in Europe.

He had therefore literally seen courts, and had conversed, not with little Abbés, Parisian *Gens de Loix*, or the despicable beings that in France assume the name of *Philosophers*, but with the first, the best, the most accomplished, persons in every country through which he accompanied Lord L——.

Too poor to be flattered, too well-born to descend to flatter others, he had acquired dignity of mind without vanity or pride, and ease and attention without servility.

He had fine sense, which his natural fire, and proper self-confidence, produced on all occasions to the best advantage.

He was open, brave, generous, sincere, well-bred; and, being in perfect good-humour

humour with himself, was extremely inclined to be so with others.

He loved women, but he also esteemed them, because he had been accustomed to the society of the most estimable, and had besides seen the female character in its most beautiful light at home.

His person was rather pleasing than what is generally called handsome.

He was of the middle stature, well-made, easy, genteel, and had the air and deportment of a man of fashion.

His education, and his military life, had given him great perfection in those exercises which improve the figure, and are becoming a soldier and a gentleman.

His complexion was brown, and rendered browner by his profession; he had

very fine chesnut hair, and the most expressive dark eyes in the world.

Let us leave our friends to amuse themselves by little tours about the neighbouring country; to read, chat, sing, dance, play at quadrille, and be happy, whilst we return a moment to town.

CHAP. X.

AFTER a comfortable night's sleep, Mr. Hammond rose, in good spirits, to receive Lady Blast's visit.

She came, she apologized, she almost blushed.

He menaced, she trembled, she acceded to the conditions of forgiveness he proposed, which

which were, to burn her delectable manuscript, and give the honest compositor an hundred pounds as a small reward for having saved her the infamy of publishing so shameful a libel.

Our heroine's fame being thus rescued from the danger which threatened it, Mr. Hammond pleaded business to shorten Lady Blast's visit, and went to Mrs. Merrick's; where, finding the good woman at home, he learned that Miss Villiers was at Lady Sophia Herbert's in Surry, where she was to stay a fortnight longer.

His heart glowed with pleasure; half his work was done to his hands; he was the intimate friend and near relation of Lady Sophia, knew her virtues, the estimation in which they stood, and the importance of the visit to Miss Villiers.

He enquired into the state of her finances, and, venturing to act as her parent for the time being, paid the few debts she had remaining, discharged her lodging and her chariot, wrote to Col. Dormer that she was in the country on a visit to the most respectable woman in the world, where he intended to join the party, and, attended by Miss Villiers's faithful old John, who had been left behind, set out for Lady Sophia's villa.

C H A P. XI.

THERE are some people who have the happy art of gaining, not only your friendship, but your confidence, in a moment.

Col. Herbert was one of these.

Warm,

Warm, sincere, open, undisguised himself, it was almost impossible to have disguise with him.

He had made it a point to gain the esteem and confidence of Miss Villiers, and had succeeded.

After passing five or six delightful days at Greenwood, in that sweet social intercourse of congenial minds which wants a name, she had taken courage, as they were walking in the garden together, whilst the two ladies were paying a visit of form, to mention the evening in Berner's-street.

"I am ashamed, Colonel," said she, with some hesitation, "to own I have seen you before, and feel most sensibly your delicacy in not appearing to recollect a circumstance so little to my honour."

"My

“ My indiscretion did not merit this delicacy; and yet I feel that I could not bear my folly should be known to any person less candid than yourself.

“ I should even be shocked if it was known to Mrs. Herbert, though I love her with the warmest affection.

“ As I must appear to you at present in a very unfavourable light, and as I have the most ardent desire of convincing you I am not unworthy your esteem, I will beg you to hear me with patience whilst I explain to you every little particular in respect to my acquaintance with Lord Melville, whom I blush to own I *did* love, and whom perhaps I do not yet think of with the indifference I ought.”

She proceeded to relate her little history, and to draw a faithful picture of her heart,
with

with a sincerity in which Col. Herbert found a thousand charms.

She even owned that the splendor of Lady H's equipage had first misled her, and that ambition had had too large a share in her partiality for Lord Melville; though she insisted, and with a vehemence which Col. Herbert did not dislike, that she really *had* loved him.

He knew that a woman seldom owns a passion till it ceases to exist.

He began to love her, and thought Lord Melville far from a dangerous rival, even had not his situation in respect to Miss Harding been what it was.

He, who was himself a man of fire, believed it impossible a man of *ton* should inspire a lasting affection: sensibility alone is the food of sensibility.

He

He had been struck *en passant* with Miss Villiers's person the first moment he saw her, but thought no more of her till they met at Mrs. Herbert's.

When he found her not only a woman of honour, but the niece of his friend, her charms appeared with redoubled lustre.

From that evening he determined to gain, at least, her friendship.

Her friendship! How are we misled by words without meaning?

It was her love to which he aspired, and which he resolved to gain.

Charming in London, at Greenwood he found her divine.

Having

Having with him no designs, no pretensions, no views either dictated by ambition or love, she was with him perfectly at ease; and only exerted that general desire of pleasing, which a young and beautiful woman naturally feels with an amiable man who shews her particular attention.

The thorn of anxiety, which her visionary schemes had planted in her bosom, and which had always given a constraint to her manner in her conversations with Lord Melville, was withdrawn, and had left her all herself.

She was now natural, artless, gay, vivacious, undesigning.

In short, she was the Maria of Belfont, not of Berners-street.

The

The ingenuity of the confession she had just been making had touched Col. Herbert in the most lively manner.

It was not her beauty, her genius, her various accomplishments, which had riveted his chains, but her noble sincerity, and the feelings of her heart.

She expressed sentiments for Lord Melville, of which he died to be himself the object.

A momentary silence had taken place, and both seemed immersed in thought, when they were aroused by the sound of carriages.

As the road was directly under the low wall on the top of which they were leaning, Miss Villiers immediately knew Lord Melville,

vile, who was in a splendid chariot with—Lady Melvile—for their hands had been joined about an hour.

The train of attendant coaches, and the white favours in the hats of the servants, made it unnecessary for her to ask any questions.

A glow of mingled disdain, expiring love, and wounded vanity, suffused her cheek.

We need not say in what manner Col. Herbert felt this event.

It is however necessary to account for the new-married pair's having passed Lady Sophia's wall.

The seat of Mr. Harding, though we did not find this of consequence enough to mention sooner, was only two miles distant from the villa of Lady Sophia.

As

As the families did not visit, this had escaped Miss Villiers's knowledge.

Lady Sophia kept little company, and was extremely delicate in the choice of it: meer money was by no means a sufficient passport to the happiness of her acquaintance.

She had a particular objection to admitting Mr. Harding into her coterie, which was that *his* father had been a menial servant to *hers*.

But to our business.

Our heroine was embarrassed, and Col. Herbert a little at a loss how to resume the conversation, when they were relieved by the arrival of the ladies and Mr. Hammond, who had accidentally met at the gate.

Mr.

Mr. Hammond at Greenwood? Mr. Hammond a friend of this family? What a pleasing surprize to the lovely Maria!

She blushed however at the idea of his being the confidant of her authorship.

She hoped he had too much honour to betray her.

He approached her with all the gallantry of sixty-five, proclaimed his passion before the whole company; and observed, after St. Evremont, that there was not the least impropriety in an old man's loving, though there might be in his expecting to be beloved; to which happiness he assured her he made not the smallest pretension.

After a turn round the garden, Lady Sophia proposed adjourning to a party at loo in the drawing-room.

Whilst

Whilst the cards were preparing, Mr. Hammond regarded Maria with looks of the strongest compassion.

“I cannot suffer her to return to town.
 “I must withdraw her from the precipice,
 “but without letting her see the hand
 “which saves her.

“The utmost delicacy is requisite on this
 “occasion: a mind like hers will bear no
 “reproof but its own.”

These were his reflections; and they produced a proposal of making a tour of a week, in which he was to be master of the revels, with unlimited power to amuse them in whatever manner he thought proper.

Miss Villiers, who, not having money to settle her affairs, was unable to quit London intirely, who dreaded returning to it, who
 wished

wished to avoid even the possibility of meeting Lord Melville, and who was too happy in her present society to think without reluctance of changing it, accepted the proposal with transport.

It was at least throwing reflection at a week's distance, which is an amazing point gained.

Whilst Lady Sophia and Mrs. Herbert were settling the necessary preparations for this little party, Miss Villiers and the Col. set down to picquet.

Miss Villiers had never observed him so attentively before; the fire of his eyes, the spirit of his whole countenance, formed such a contrast with the maukish, unmeaning, uninformed, macaroni faces about town, as could not fail to strike very forcibly a woman of her turn of mind.

He

He was certainly not so handsome as Lord Melville—O! not a thousandth part so handsome—

And yet she knew not how—but he was more interesting—had more soul—

There was an animation—something so speaking in his every look—not an atom of Lord Melville's *sang froid*.

In short, he was a very amiable man, and though a woman would be unpardonable who should *love* twice, yet there was certainly no impropriety in having a friendship for a man of such distinguished merit.

There was something so charming in his attention to his mother—he was so perfectly well-bred to women—so much more than well-bred, so much in earnest, so *empressé*, to oblige them—

But

But what was all this to her?—Lord Melvile was false, but his falsehood would be a very inadequate apology for hers.

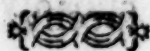
Yes, he was indeed false, but he was still as dear to her as ever.

“Adored object of my tenderness, whilst this heart beats, it shall beat for thee.”

Col. Herbert interrupted this sentimental reverie by producing point, quint, and quatorze, which finished the game almost as soon as it was begun.

The ladies and Mr. Hammond returned; the play became general; loo took the place of picquet: supper was announced, Pam retired; they chatted away an extremely pleasant evening, and set out at nine the next day; Lady Sophia and Mr. Hammond in her ladyship's post-chaise; and Col. Her-

bert, with Miss Villiers and his sister, in that of Mr. Hammond.



C H A P. XII.

THE plan of our travellers was to have no plan at all, which we take to be the most rational and eligible that human invention can suggest.

They went every day exactly as far as they chose, without giving attention either to hours or mile-stones; flew like the wind, or passed leisurely to observe the face of the country, just as inclination pointed out.

They mounted every hill that promised an agreeable prospect, whether it lay in or out of the direct road; stopped at a twelve-penny

penny hop, at a strolling play, at a wake, at a village-wedding; and partook of twenty more little innocent amusements which we have not time to specify.

They saw all the fine houses on the road which contained any thing worth observation; but, as we think seeing fine houses the dullest of all things which assume the name of pleasure, we beg to be excused descending to particulars.

The sixth day of their tour arrived: the proposed week was almost at an end.

Lady Sophia first observed it was time to think of returning to town.

Miss Villiers's heart sunk at the proposal: return to town! return to anxiety, to solitude, to distress!

She had been so happy ! They were become so much one family ! She adored Lady Sophia ; perhaps she might never see her again.

A sudden damp pervaded every bosom ; they lamented that the hours of happiness should ever have an end ; that friends so well suited to each other should ever part.

A sigh of regret escaped Maria ; Col. Herbert observed it, and pressed her hand by an involuntary impulse.

The dreaded order was given ; the horses heads were turned towards London, from whence they were now distant eighty miles.

They travelled later this evening than they had ever done before, in order to reach an inn which Mr. Hammond strongly recommended,

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commended, and which was kept by one of his servants, for whom he had a great affection.

In vain the host of the inn they left exhausted all the common-place rhetoric usual on these occasions; assured them the roads were bad, being cross the country; that there were highwaymen abroad; that it threatened a storm.

Mr. Hammond was obstinate, the ladies compliant, and the chaises moved forward.

After they had gone about ten miles in a very indifferent road, the night came on almost imperceptibly.

To render its shades more gloomy, a thick cloud obscured the whole horizon.

They were now at the entrance of an extensive common: the postilions stopped, declared

declared themselves utterly unacquainted with the road, and unable to proceed farther without a guide, which it was now impossible to procure.

It was happy for them that Col. Herbert had been accustomed to *reconnoitre*: he quitted the chaise, mounted his servant's horse, and directing the postilions to stop till his return, undertook to be their *avant-courreur*.

The storm now broke at once upon them; the big tempest rose, the winds whistled round and shook the trees to their lowest roots, the rain descended in torrents, the thunder rolled, the streaming lightnings ran along the ground, and produced a luminous glare more terrific than darkness itself.

Col. Herbert had been gone from them half an hour; an interval of which my reader will imagine all the horrors.

What

What a situation for women! For women delicately bred, and unused

“ To bide the pelting of the pitiless storm.”

Their fears were more than doubled by Col. Herbert's long absence, and by their anxiety on his account.

They called to him, but no sound returned, except that of their own voices, reverberated by the echo.

It is easy to image the feelings of a mother on such an occasion; nor were those of Mrs. Herbert and Miss Villiers much less keen.

Mr. Hammond said every thing he could to encourage them, but to no purpose: their apprehensions were raised to the highest pitch, all contributed to make them pant

for an asylum, when Col. Herbert returned, and informed them, that, dark as it was, he had discovered the track of wheels, and had heard, though faintly, the barking of village dogs.

With what transport they received this intelligence none but those who have been in a similar situation can conceive.

They now hoped to regain the haunts of men.

At all events Col. Herbert was safe.

The storm lost half its terrors from this consideration.

They advanced, though slowly and with caution, in the track Col. Herbert pointed out, and in about an hour had the happiness to hear a clock strike; and to see, through a coppice of trees, a glimmering light at a little distance.

Directed

Directed by the light, they turned the corner of the coppice, and passed a row of cottages, at the end of which, a little detached from the road, on a gently-rising ground, they saw a house from whence the light which had directed them proceeded.

They rang at the bell, two servants came with lights, a lady and gentleman followed them to the gate, and on getting out of the chaise Miss Villiers found herself in the arms of her sister.

“ Maria !”

“ Louisa !”

They could say no more: astonishment and joy rendered them breathless.

Col. Dormer, though not less happy to see her, was less agitated, and enough mas-

ter of himself to do the honours of his house.

He was charmed to see Lady Sophia, with whom he had been acquainted in her married state, though he had not seen her since she had been a widow.

What surprized Maria most was, to find Mr. Hammond so well acquainted in the family.

Our travellers entered the hospitable walls of Belfont, and, instead of being intruders on strangers, as they expected, had the delight of finding themselves at home.

C H A P. XIII.

IT is unnecessary to paint the joyous evening at Belfont; but it may not be amiss to observe, that Mr. Hammond was in such spirits after supper, that he fairly owned the meeting of this group of friends to have been; not accidental, but a surprize of his contriving; and that he had communicated the scheme, by letter, to Col. Dormer, who therefore had expected and prepared for them, but without betraying the secret, even to Louisa, who was as much astonished at the meeting as her sister.

“I protest, however,” said he, “that I did not act in concert with the storm; though I found it a very useful auxiliary.”

“I was under particular obligations to the thunder, because, being unseasonable,

M. 6

“and

"and therefore unexpected, it had ten times the more effect.

"I must give the ladies credit for their courage; they faced with heroism a war of elements, which would have terrified a *macaroni* into hysterics.

"Confess, ladies, did you ever see so charming an object as the light in this parlour window?"

The hours passed on so rapidly, that it was four in the morning before even the female part of the company thought of retiring.

Mr. Hammond, who was a *bon vivant*, because it had been the *ton* in his youth, insisted on one bottle of claret more to the health of the ladies who had just left them.

His

His share of this bottle elevated Col. Herbert, who was before a little *in alt*, to the pitch of declaring his passion for Miss Villiers to her uncle, and protesting, that, though he was too poor at present to marry her himself, he would run any other man through the body who should dare to think of her.

He was the best-humoured creature that can be imagined, sung *beviamo tutti tre*, danced an allemande with Mr. Hammond, drank the king's health, and the ladies, on his knees, threw the glasses over his head, and committed a thousand indecorums, not one of which had the least analogy with the present style of elegant society.

Not but that he was one of the soberest men in the world, but—after a storm—to the health of one's prince, or one's mistress—I forgive him with all my heart.

It

It was with great difficulty Mr. Hammond prevailed on him to retire to his chamber, where, instead of going to bed, he kept the good old man two hours to hear him protest five hundred times over, and in nearly the same words, that Cleopatra and Helen of Greece were dowdies compared to the divine Maria Villiers.

Morpheus at last took compassion on Mr. Hammond, and inclined our young foldier to let him retire to his apartment.

The leaden god kept possession of the whole company till eleven the next day, when on assembling in the breakfast parlour, they met Mr. Montague with his son and daughter, who, having heard of Maria's arrival, with her friends, came to invite them to a little ball the next day at the manor-house.

The

The invitation was accepted, and the Montagues consented to spend the day at Col. Dormer's.

Col. Herbert, after making a thousand apologies to Col. Dormer for having kept him up the night before, took him into the garden; and having, as in duty bound, paid his devoirs to the reigning Sultana of his green-house, a hyacinth of distinguished beauty, very *soberly* asked his permission to address his lovely niece.

"Your claret, my dear sir, has done a great deal for me, by precipitating my confession.

"I love Miss Villiers, and my reason and my heart are equally touched. Besides regarding her as the most lovely of women, I find myself unhappy at the idea of losing her society.

I

"If

“ If I had a throne, I would offer it to
 “ her; I have only a cottage, and I esteem
 “ her enough to believe, that, if I am so
 “ happy as to be agreeable to her, the dif-
 “ ference between one and the other is not
 “ essential.

“ My paternal fortune is small; and I
 “ divide it with my mother, whose little in-
 “ come before was really insufficient to sup-
 “ port her with decency.

“ I have only to offer, the glorious hopes
 “ of a soldier; a soldier well-born, well-
 “ allied, and fond of his profession, which
 “ he has not disgraced.

“ If Miss Villiers will condescend to share
 “ those hopes, and, in the mean time, to
 “ conform to my present situation, I shall
 “ be the happiest man on earth.

“ My

"My mother is at this moment pleading my cause with Miss Villiers; may I ask you to add your persuasions?"

"Here she comes herself, my dear Charles, and I leave you to settle the point with her."

"You will say more for yourself in five minutes, than Lady Sophia and I should say in ten years."

"I have only to observe, that gain my niece's consent, and you are sure of mine at any time."

There is no eloquence so successful as the language of an impassioned heart: before this conversation ended, Miss Villiers was convinced of two truths very important to female happiness, that it is possible to love
twice,

twice, and to be happy without either a coach and six or a title.

Miss Villiers left him not devoid of hope, and hastened to dress with her sister, her own apartment being given up to Lady Sophia.

During this interval the two sisters entered into mutual confidence on all which had happened to them during this absence; and Maria had the pleasure to find the amiable Louisa was in a few days to be united to a man she had always loved.

She then related her history, and dwelt particularly on her first interview with Col. Herbert.

“If I should marry him,” said she, “it would be the most extraordinary commencement of a matrimonial engagement that ever happened.

“I have

"I have been very indiscreet indeed,
"Louisa, but the inconveniences I have
"found from that indiscretion will make
"me a pattern of circumspection for the
"future."

On relating the circumstance of the hundred pounds which had dropped from the clouds, Louisa's suspicions fell very rightly on Mr. Hammond.

The whole constellation of friends, the Montagues included, were drinking their coffee after dinner, when Cap. Dormer's servant, whom he had sent on business to Stamford, returned, and brought him his letters from the post.

The first he opened was from his whip-merchant at the Hague, with advice of his having purchased him a polyanthus, which
he

he assured him would grace the garden of an emperor.

Joy lighted up his whole countenance on reading the second; he gave it to Mr. Hammond, who, by his desire, read aloud as follows:

“MY LORD, Naples, Jan. 15, 1775.

It is my duty to inform your lordship, that my old lord, your honoured kinsman, the Earl of Clairville, died this morning, and has left your lordship the family estate, with sixty thousand pounds in the stocks.

It is expressed in the will that my lord left the estate and money to your lordship, both that it might not be divided from the title, which is your lordship's by inheritance, and to make you amends for his having treated you harshly in his life-time.

I hope

I hope to have the honour of being continued in your lordship's service, and am,

My Lord,

With respect,

Your Lordship's dutiful Servant,

WILLIAM JOHNSON.

P. S. I have directed the letter in your lordship's old name, for fear of mistakes at the post-office."

The relationship was so distant, and the late Lord Clairville's treatment of the present so unworthy, that grief could not be supposed to have any share in the feelings of the latter.

Congratulations are points taken for granted, had not every person present been, what however they were, personally interested in the change of Col. Dormer's situation.

"I have

"I have always," said he, addressing his
 nieces, "expected this event, but would not
 communicate my hopes to you, lest they
 should end in disappointment. I may
 now be allowed to build castles in the
 air; it depends greatly on you, my dear
 girls, to realize them.

"I have more money than I know how
 to make use of myself: I therefore pre-
 sent each of you with twenty thousand
 pounds, and leave it to yourselves to be-
 stow it as you please.

"I wish you (though in this I leave you
 perfectly free) to fix in this neighbour-
 hood, because no accession of fortune
 would make me amends for the loss of
 your society.

"Louisa

“ Louisa has already made a choice which
“ leaves me nothing to wish in respect to
“ her.

“ Maria, are you determined on celi-
“ bacy?”

Her eyes were involuntarily turned on
Col. Herbert; she perceived it, looked
down, and blushed.

“ I understand you, and am happy : I will
“ spare your confusion, my dear Maria, and
“ give you to my cadet.

“ And now for my airy project; it is to
“ form a neighbourhood of persons en-
“ deared to each other by the most tender
“ ties.

“ My

“ My duty to my prince and my country
 “ will oblige me to reside part of the year
 “ in London : I will take a house there suf-
 “ ficiently large for us all, where every one
 “ shall be at home, and without the shadow
 “ of restraint.

“ For our best, our rural, house, as Lord
 “ Clairville, who lived abroad, and hated
 “ his native country, long since sold the fa-
 “ mily seat of his and my ancestors, I have
 “ a house and little domain in view for my-
 “ self, not two miles distant, at the top of
 “ yon hill, on the other side the rivulet
 “ which divides the two counties *.

“ Col. Herbert and Maria, being soldiers,
 “ and therefore citizens of the world, shall,
 “ if, as I hope, it is agreeable to them,
 “ make mine their country-house.

* Of Rutland and Northampton.

“ There,

“ There, perhaps, Mr. Hammond, to
“ whom Maria has obligations of which she
“ is at present ignorant, will join our syl-
“ van party, and be literally

“ Our guide, philosopher, and friend.”

“ And there,” said the good old man,
“ your lordship shall build us a theatre;
“ and Miss Villiers and I will, in defiance
“ of managers, write tragedies, and play
“ them ourselves.”

Maria blushed, and Lord Clairville pro-
ceeded.

“ We will build a little, plant a great
“ deal, and above all, garden to infinity.”

“ Perhaps Lady Sophia will dispose of
“ her villa in Surry, and honour Belfont by
“ making it her future residence.

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“ You

“ You will love this country, madam ; it
 “ is still

“ A land unspoil’d by barbarous wealth,”
 “ and inhabited by our old race of Eng-
 “ lish gentlemen.

“ I will write directly to my lawyer, and
 “ my correspondent at the Hague : the mar-
 “ riage settlements shall be drawn, and the
 “ polyanthus imported.

“ I will indulge an innocent folly, if it is
 “ a folly, which gives offence to no one, and
 “ extremely gratifies myself.

“ And now who will say that Fortune,
 “ though in herself contemptible, does not
 “ sometimes contribute to happiness ?

“ She has enabled me to spend the even-
 “ ing of my life in the society of all those
 “ most

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“most dear to me, to give my amiable
“Louisa and Maria to the two men on
“earth who, in my opinion, most deserve
“them, and to have a collection of vegeta-
“tive beauty which shall be the wonder
“and the envy of the universe.”

T H E E N D.